16 FEBRUARY 2018 | GENEVA - WHO is announcing today a new high-level comission, comprised of heads of state and ministers, leaders in health and development and entrepreneurs. The group will propose bold and innovative solutions to accelerate prevention and control of the leading killers on the planet – noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) like heart and lung disease, cancers, and diabetes.

The WHO Independent Global High-level Commission on NCDs is co-chaired by President Tabaré Vázquez of Uruguay; President Maithripala Sirisena of Sri Lanka; President Sauli Niinistö of Finland; Veronika Skvortsova, Minister of Healthcare of the Russian Federation; and Sania Nishtar, former Federal Minister of Pakistan.

Seven in 10 deaths globally every year are from NCDs, the main contributors to which are tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diets, and physical inactivity. More than 15 million people between the ages of 30 and 70 years die from NCDs annually. Low- and lower-middle income countries are increasingly affected, with half of premature deaths from NCDs occurring in those countries. Many lives can be saved from NCDs through early diagnosis and improved access to quality and affordable treatment, as well as a whole-of-government approach to reduce the main risk factors.

“NCDs are the world’s leading avoidable killers but the world is not doing enough to prevent and control them,” says Dr Vázquez. “We have to ask ourselves if we want to condemn future generations from dying too young, and living lives of ill health and lost opportunity. The answer clearly is ‘no.’ But there is so much we can do to safeguard and care for people, from protecting everyone from tobacco, harmful use of alcohol, and unhealthy foods and sugary drinks, to giving people the health services they need to stop NCDs in their tracks.”

Mr Michael R. Bloomberg, WHO Global Ambassador for Noncommunicable Diseases and Commission member, said: “For the first time in history, more people are dying of noncommunicable diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes, than infectious diseases. This loss of human life spares no one — rich or poor, young or old - and it imposes heavy economic costs on nations. The more public support we can build for government policies that are proven to save lives - as this Commission will work to do - the more progress we'll be able to make around the world."

The new Commission was established by WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and runs until October 2019. It will provide actionable recommendations to contribute to the Third United Nations General Assembly High-level Meeting on NCDs scheduled for the second half of 2018. This will include the submission of its first report to Dr Tedros in early June.

“Everybody deserves the right to a healthy life,” says Dr Tedros. “We can beat the drivers of the NCD epidemic, which are among the world’s main obstacles to health. I am looking to the

Commission to show us new ways to unblock the barriers to good health, and identify innovative, bold and practical actions steps to scale up prevention and treatment of NCDs and provide health for all."

Co-chair Dr Nishtar says the Commission's establishment has come at an opportune time, as the world prepares for the UN High-level Meeting on NCDs. "This year, governments will be held to account on progress they have made in protecting their citizens from NCDs," says Dr Nishtar. "While there have been improvements in some countries and regions, the overall rate of progress has been unacceptably slow. This is resulting in too many people suffering and dying needlessly from NCDs, and leaving families, communities and governments to bear the human and economic costs."

The World Health Assembly has endorsed the set of WHO "best buys" and other cost-effective interventions proven to prevent or delay most premature NCD deaths. Such measures, which can be readily scaled up in countries, target prevention and treatment of, and raising awareness about, NCDs.

http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2018/world-leaders-ncds/en/