Thank you, thank you Fiona.

Excellency, second Lady Hajia Samira Bawumia of Ghana, my colleague colleague Dr Taalas, Secretary General of WMO and my sister Olga, excellencies, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

First of all I would like to welcome to WHO, and to the first WHO Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health.

It's an honour to have you as our guests for this historic meeting.

We're here because we know that air pollution is one of the biggest threats to global health, and we need to do something about it – and urgently.

Let me remind you of some of the numbers.

Air pollution kills 7 million people each year.

Around the world, 9 out of 10 people breathe air that has been polluted by traffic emissions, industry, agriculture and waste incineration.

About 3 billion people continue to use smoky, polluting stoves and fuels inside their homes for cooking and heating.

Our latest estimates are that up to one-third of deaths from heart attack, stroke, lung cancer and chronic respiratory diseases are due to air pollution.

No one escapes, from the womb to the grave.

Some of our children will not reach their full potential because of exposure to air pollution in the womb and in early life; some of our parents will die early because of exposure to it throughout their lives.

And in many parts of the world, it's getting worse.
===
The most tragic thing about these 7 million deaths is that they are so preventable.

But the fact that they are preventable should give us reason for optimism. There is something we can do.

It will require strong political will, swift action and endurance, but I am optimistic that we can, and must, do better.

I'm optimistic because we have everything we need to take action.

We have overwhelming evidence of the harm that air pollution does;

We have hard figures to demonstrate the heavy burden of air pollution on human health, economies and food security — and the staggering opportunity cost of inaction;

And I fully agree, Fiona actually said it in a better way, that the cost of action is high but the cost of inaction is even greater.

We have overwhelming evidence of the harm that air pollution does. We have had figures to demonstrate the heavy burden of air pollution on human health, economies and food security and the staggering opportunity cost of inaction.

And we have many proven solutions in almost all areas that contribute to air pollution, and more are emerging all the time.

I am optimistic because we are seeing more and more examples of cities, regions and countries around the world that are taking action.

I am optimistic because more and more people are arming themselves with information, and are speaking out for their right to breathe clean air.

===

There is much that we can do to improve air quality, but we must all play our part.

WHO is taking on the battle against air pollution because its devastating health impacts make it our fight, too.

We are empowering health professionals to explain the risks of air pollution to their patients and how best to reduce those risks.

But we're also giving them the skills and evidence to be advocates for health in policy decisions that impact air quality and public health.

Through global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Accord and the Urban Agenda 2030, WHO is building alliances with partners working in energy, climate and environment.

We are working to engage actors in transport, urban planning, housing, energy, and environment, by giving them the tools, resources and support to evaluate the health impacts of their policy decisions.

===

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

No person, group, city, country or region can solve the problem alone. We need strong commitments and action from everyone: governments, community leaders, mayors, civil

society, the private sector, and individuals.

We need all countries and cities to commit to meeting WHO standards for air quality in the next 12 years.

We need to agree unequivocally on the need for a world free of air pollution.

We need common goals for our common future, such as reducing the number of deaths from air pollution.

This is the challenge before us.

Thank you for your commitment. And together we have the opportunity this week to take practical steps to ensure that our children and our grandchildren breathe cleaner air.

I urge all of you to seize that opportunity with both hands.

I thank you.