

# COMMONWEALTH HEALTH MINISTERS MEETING

## Geneva, Switzerland, 16 May 2010

### Ministerial Statement on MDGs

Commonwealth Health Ministers held their annual Meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, on the eve of the 63<sup>rd</sup> World Health Assembly. The theme of the Meeting was '*The Commonwealth and the Health MDGs by 2015*'. The Meeting was chaired by Hon Dr Hubert A Minnis, Minister of Health for the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

2. Ministers acknowledged the progress made globally towards the attainment of the health-related MDGs, including the steady reduction in under-five deaths from 12.6 million in 1990 to 9 million in 2007. Ministers were pleased to note that at least 16 developing Commonwealth countries have achieved or are on track to achieve MDG 5. Other achievements include a reduction in AIDS deaths and new HIV infections; the ten-fold increase, within five years, in access to anti-retroviral medication in low-income countries; and a decline in HIV prevalence rates in at least 11 countries between 2000-2007. At least 18 countries have achieved or are on track to achieve the measles vaccination targets. The wide distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets has reduced the toll of malaria, a major killer of children. The incidence of tuberculosis has declined in 25 countries.

3. However, the Meeting noted that only five per cent of Commonwealth developing countries have met MDG 4 targets or are on track to do so. At least 19 countries have high

maternal mortality rates, and only 36 per cent of developing Commonwealth countries have achieved or are on track to achieve the targets for births attended by skilled staff. This makes the attainment of MDG 5 a particular challenge for the Commonwealth.

4. The Meeting also noted the major challenges facing the world, and Commonwealth countries in particular, if the MDGs are to be met. Increasing poverty levels, the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS, insufficient financial and human resources, weak implementation capacity, inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems and the global economic crisis, have made it difficult for some Commonwealth countries to be on track in terms of meeting MDG targets generally, and health-related ones specifically. Ministers highlighted their continued concerns relating to the migration of health care providers. Ministers expressed concerns that for developing countries to achieve the MDGs, they must be able to retain their health workers through training and retention strategies and ethical recruitment and, wherever possible, through the development of specialised mechanisms of co-operation with recipient countries.

5. Notwithstanding the challenges, and learning from the experiences of some Commonwealth countries which have made progress on the MDGs, Ministers were optimistic that many of the 2015 MDG targets could be met by Commonwealth countries. They, however, noted that this would require greater technical co-operation; attention to enabling environments, including legal frameworks, and where appropriate free healthcare to mothers and children; and an integration of preventative and curative services in the context of strengthening health systems through primary healthcare. They noted that this would require concerted commitment to national,

regional and global interventions and to meeting the growing resource gap.

6. Ministers called on the global community, especially the G8 and G20, to support maternal and newborn health programmes, and to meet MDGs 4 and 5. They particularly called for support to meet the target of 90 per cent of births being attended by skilled health workers by 2015. They also agreed to work towards increasing the number of births attended by skilled staff in their own countries.

7. Whilst acknowledging the tremendous achievements in access to anti-retroviral treatment, the Ministers noted that two-thirds of those needing treatment did not receive it. The Ministers, therefore, expressed their disappointment that the target of universal access to HIV treatment was unlikely to be met. They called for concerted global efforts to ensure universal access to HIV care and treatment as a matter of urgency.

8. Commonwealth Health Ministers undertook to articulate, individually and collectively through the Secretary-General, the need for action on the health-related MDGs at the High-level Summit on the MDGs which is due to take place at the UN in September 2010.

9. Recalling the Commonwealth Heads of Government statement on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), which recognised the growing burden of NCDs in the Commonwealth, Ministers pledged support for the greater alignment of NCD issues with the MDGs. Ministers welcomed the adoption of UN General Assembly Resolution A/64/L.52 (Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases) and committed to

discussions of the NCDs at the UN High Level Review Meeting for the MDGs in September 2010 and called for the highest participation in the UNGASS on NCDs in September 2011.

Commonwealth Secretariat  
Geneva  
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