The Bottom Billion Conference: 'This is the time to send a loud and simple message to Heads of State and Governments'

Language English

NCDs of the Bottom Billion Conference, 2-3 March, Harvard University

Opening Statement by the NCD Alliance delivered by Jean-Claude Mbanya, President of the International Diabetes Federation

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be at this conference speaking on behalf of NCD Alliance.

The NCD Alliance comprises the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), the World Heart Federation (WHF), the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) and the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union).

We formed 2 years ago to place NCDs further up the global health agenda and get urgent action on a neglected epidemic which is killing 35 million people worldwide every year, and causing catastrophic human misery and economic loss.

One of our prime concerns was the suffering of the billion poorest people who have little or no access to NCD prevention, diagnosis and treatment. It is a tide of human misery that I see in my hospital in Cameroon every working day. Children with Type 1 diabetes put onto the streets by parents because the cost of their treatment would bankrupt their entire family.

Can we ever know what it feels like as a parent to have to choose in that way between the lives of our children? Do we know the suffering of patients with curable cancers sent home to die painful deaths because they were not diagnosed, no treatment is available and they cannot even be offered palliative care? The NCD Alliance called for the UN Summit on NCDs because we imagined a better world.

The Summit taking place this September in New York is our generations chance to break the myths that surround NCDs and move into talking about solutions. One persistent myth is that NCDs are not diseases of the poorest billion and therefore not a development issue. This conference will demonstrate that the growing NCD epidemic should clearly be a top priority for developing country governments and development agencies.

Now is the time for researchers, advocates and practitioners to come together as one NCD movement to fight for action for the poorest people. The four federations of the NCD Alliance got together to create a louder global voice and another 240 organisations have now joined our Common Interest Group. This is not the time to enter into a competition between diseases.

This is the time to send a loud and simple message to the Heads of State and Governments who will attend the UN Summit on NCDs that we have solutions and that every country can and must do something now to alleviate the burden of premature death and suffering. On behalf of the NCD Alliance I welcome you to this conference, thank the organisers and other supporting organisations and look forward to a lively and important two days.

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