
Uruguay's President Vázquez gives the fight against NCDs a welcome boost



© United Nations- Dr Tabaré Vázquez, President of Uruguay, addresses the general debate of the General Assembly's seventy first session, 20 September 2016

NCD Alliance Statement

21 September 2016, New York - NCD Alliance commends Uruguay's President Tabaré Vázquez's championing of the NCD agenda, exemplified yesterday in his address to the 71st United Nations General Assembly. His General Debate speech called on the global community to unify to tackle the leading cause of death and disability worldwide, non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

President Vázquez's address demonstrated not only his own commitment and leadership to propelling his own country towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, but implored others to scale up to do so as well. NCD Alliance is grateful for President Vázquez's actions which summons further global political energy to move the NCD agenda forward.

"NCDs may not be dealt with in isolation; from this seat we invite all countries, governments and peoples to form an alliance against non-communicable diseases. An alliance for a healthy life as wide, vigorous and dynamic as possible. And it is possible, not easy, but possible", said President Vázquez.

"NCDs, to a great extent, result from four risk factors directly related to supposedly 'typical behaviours of modern lifestyle': smoking, alcoholism, unhealthy diet and sedentary lifestyle. The main effects of the risk factors are increasingly being suffered by low and middle income countries and the poorest people in all countries, thus having a strong impact on the underlying socio-economic determinants. Vicious circles are easily formed in these populations: poverty exposes people to behavioural risk factors of NCDs and in turn, these diseases tend to make poverty even worse", he said.

President Vázquez's highlighted the importance of strengthening health systems in the response to the NCD epidemic: *"Health systems suffer the impact of costly treatments required by non-communicable diseases [...] For example, direct cost of smoking in Latin-American health systems is estimated at 33 billion dollars, which is equivalent to 0.5% of the GDP of our region and 7% of the amount estimated to be annually expended in health (taxes on tobacco are lower than 50% of the direct cost resulting from smoking)".*

Under Vázquez leadership, Uruguay's has demonstrated that a willingness to tackle NCDs risk factors head-on is the cornerstone of success. In a previous address to the UNGA in 2015, President Vázquez highlighted the need for global leaders to commit to address public health as *"an unavoidable responsibility of States."* With NCDs such as

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cancer, lung disease, heart disease, and diabetes responsible for 68% of global mortality, this came as an urgent call to Heads of State and Government to take action and deliver on commitments.

Uruguay is recognised as a world leader in tobacco control, with pioneering actions on graphic pictorial warnings, advertising restrictions, and tobacco packaging language that have yielded impressive declines in tobacco use across the population, resulting in an 8% annual decline in the prevalence of students smoking and a 22% annual decline in acute myocardial infarctions. The Government of Uruguay has continued to set an example in its commitment to curbing the rising tide of NCDs, undertaking to address challenges presented by other key NCD risk factors such as alcohol, physical inactivity, and poor nutrition.

Yesterday evening, at an awards ceremony held in New York, President Vázquez was one of 5 people honoured with a Bloomberg Hopkins 100 Award for Public Health. In the past year, in recognition of his contributions to tobacco control, health promotion and reproductive health, President Vázquez has received a Science and Peace award from Inter American Heart Association, a World Heart Federation Award for Political Advocacy for Global Health, and a Champion Award from Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids.

Gratefully receiving his Bloomberg Hopkins award, President Vázquez credited the people of Uruguay with the progress made on tackling tobacco. In further recognition of his prioritisation of addressing social justice issues, President Vázquez also received an award for social inclusion from the Americas Society and Council of the Americas. This award, also given yesterday, acknowledges positive economic and social agenda achievements in Latin American countries, based on an index of social inclusion.

"President Vázquez has once again shown Uruguay's commitment to public health by engaging with global leaders to ask them to work together on reducing tobacco use and the burden of NCDs. A major challenge in combating NCDs is encouraging governments to undertake the comprehensive framework of policies necessary to deliver progress. President Vázquez's intervention today, on this global stage, gives the fight against NCDs – and tobacco use – a welcome boost. We support President Vázquez's call for action, specifically for countries to fully implement the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, and encourage other governments to join in this commendable initiative." said Mr José Luis Castro, Chair of NCD Alliance.

NCD Alliance Executive Director, Katie Dain said: *"Governments have recognised that NCDs are a poverty, inequality, and social justice issue. We look forward to seeing more world leaders join President Vázquez's leadership by prioritising NCDs in their own countries. Acting across sectors will reduce the burden of NCDs, which is an integral step to also achieving 2030 Agenda targets beyond those focused on health."*

Download President Vázquez speech to the 71st UN General Assembly in various languages in the link below.

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