We, as current and former parliamentarians, decision makers and organisations in global health, acknowledge that infectious diseases are one of the leading causes of death worldwide and represent a major global health threat with a vast human cost. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, this cost is now more apparent than ever. Infectious diseases place a significant burden on lives, communities, health systems, and businesses, that affects millions around the world each year. This burden is noticeably deepening health and economic inequalities, while fuelling social injustice across our societies.

As science and society have advanced, we have new mechanisms and ideation at our disposal by which we can protect lives from infectious diseases. The 2030 United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out a clear and ambitious vision: *to end poverty and other deprivations through strategies that improve health and education* – of which a world free of endemic diseases is integral. The SDGs achieved commitment from all Member States and provides clear targets to guide governments into a fair, equitable, healthy and sustainable society. Tangible progress has been made.

Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed an unprecedented crisis, impacting all facets of humanity, and jeopardizing these global commitments. It has disrupted international responses to existing infectious diseases and undermined decades of gains for their elimination. Fragilities in global partnerships were exposed and showed the incapacity of governments
to join and respond effectively to the crisis; with most foregoing a global vision of sustainable development to uphold national interests.

COVID-19 poses the greatest communicable disease threat of our time. Political leaders must mobilise and urgently invest in the resources needed to ensure existing and new health tools are utilised effectively and equitably – so no person’s life or wellbeing is endangered by an infectious disease.

UNITE, as a global network of current and former parliamentarians, is an integral part of this journey towards achieving the SDGs, through our mission of eliminating infectious diseases as a global health threat by active political intervention. We believe that we can affect concrete change through uniting the voices of members of parliament, senates, and congresses across the world, beyond party politics, to join in one voice that will ensure that no life is limited by infectious disease. Now is the time for parliamentarians to reach across aisles and borders to find common ground. Now is the time for action. To emerge from this crisis and reset the efforts needed to achieve what is a clear global commitment, we must turn to the SDGs as a lighthouse to guide us through.

We, as a network of peoples’ representatives in nations around the world, in partnership with decision makers and organisations working in global health, call on parliaments and governments to uphold the SDGs and their commitments to ending infectious diseases as a global health threat, in the midst and aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments must demonstrate political will to control the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate its social and economic impact while not lowering the guard on other infectious diseases. We challenge Governments to rethink partnerships and global health structures to adapt to this new reality, to use evidence-based decisions to improve global health, and to actively maintain infectious diseases high on the political agenda.
Hereby, UNITE, as current and former representatives of the people, alongside decision makers and organisations working in global health, urgently call on governments to:

**Prioritise investment in research, development, and innovation, encouraging the acceleration of critical vaccines, medicines, and diagnostics, while safeguarding equitable access for those who need them.**

- Ensure sustained investment is channelled into the development and deployment of health tools, while bringing together the public and private sector, industries, global community, and public health actors.
- Advocate for policies and approaches that enable equitable access to these health tools for the most vulnerable populations, regardless of their ability to pay.

**Accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, namely Universal Health Coverage, which need to include supporting policies that safeguard and reinforce national health budgets for public health services, and prioritise prevention, primary and person-centred health care.**

- Uphold all international commitments made by nations, including the 2030 Agenda and others addressing infectious diseases and cross cutting health policies, namely HIV and AIDS, viral hepatitis, tuberculosis, malaria, waterborne diseases, neglected tropical diseases roadmap, antimicrobial resistance, public health preparedness, vulnerable populations, drug policy, and vaccination coverage.
- Ensure services are holistic and comprehensive healthcare is offered (and integrated, where appropriate) across infectious diseases co-infections, co-morbidities, sexual and reproductive health and rights, preventative therapies, and mental health support.
- Ensure policies are aligned with comprehensive health services, including social protection, that meet the needs of key and neglected population groups, through innovative approaches like decentralization, in line delivery options, scale up multi-month dispensing and community refills of medicines for people with chronic diseases.
- Leverage a multi-sectoral approach and non-health actors’ role in ensuring continuity in access to health services and reaching Universal Health Coverage, under a vision of “health in all policies”.
- Acknowledge the centrality of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in health care facilities to ensure the safety, quality and sustainability of universal health coverage.
• Establish sustainable measures for financing to ensure future preparedness and response to epidemic infectious diseases.

**Assure global and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics by uniting efforts for a fast, global solution.**

• Support international cooperation through the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, a global collaboration coordinated by the WHO to accelerate the development, production, and equitable access to new (and repurposed) COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines

• Advocate for the funding needed for complex testing, drug, vaccine development and manufacturing; committing support for the global health organisations and their partners who are leading this effort, including the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, GAVI, WHO, FIND, CEPI, the World Bank, Unitaid, and COVID-19 Therapeutics Accelerator.

**Prioritise health promotion and infectious disease prevention through transparent, accountable, and inclusive global public health governance.**

• Recognise the need to re-examine and revitalise global partnerships, international mechanisms, and prevention, preparedness and response frameworks for a post COVID-19 society.

• Accelerate the discussions and development of a new Global Public Health Convention, that holds countries to a higher level of responsibility and provides global health institutions the authority to coordinate and enforce international health regulations required to prevent the human and economic harms of public health emergencies of international concern and pandemics.

**Empower people and communities by acknowledging their role in the first line of defence for affected populations and as leaders on the ground.**

Support them fully as they are the backbone of communicable disease programmes around the world.

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Acknowledgements

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