

DR TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS: MD

Mr Chancellor,

Access to healthcare is still one of the most pressing and complex challenges that humanity faces, and even when progress is made, great vigilance is necessary to ensure that established solutions are not lost because of political or geographical upheavals. One of the major forces that promotes and supports the ongoing development of worldwide healthcare is the World Health Organization which was founded in 1948 “to promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable.” It is a great privilege to welcome the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, whom we are honouring today.

Dr Tedros is man of prodigious achievements, who throughout his career has developed initiatives and services that have changed and saved lives, particularly throughout Africa and specifically Ethiopia. He was born in 1965 in Asmara, Eritrea (formerly Ethiopia) and as he was growing up, became passionate about the concept of “health for all” regardless of social status because, as he once wrote, he grew up “surrounded by people who were hard-working and committed, and...saw that no matter how hard they worked, the decks were stacked against them due to the unequal playing field.”

His developing belief in the concept of Universal Health Coverage was sharpened by other experiences. He received a BSc in Biology from Asmara University in Eritrea (formerly Ethiopia) in 1986, and then in 1988, Dr Tedros received a scholarship for four months of diplomat training in Denmark. In advance of this, he received a Danish health insurance card in the post covering him for 12 months. This was the first time he had received any kind of health coverage and it fuelled his belief that “health for all” could be a practical reality.

DR TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS: MD

Dr Tedros went on to receive an MSc in the Immunology of Infectious Diseases from the University of London in 1992, and subsequently a PhD in Community Health from the University of Nottingham in 2000. His experience with the National Health Service – another organization founded in 1948, in the midst of a shattered post-war economy – further convinced him that Universal Health Coverage was an achievable goal, despite adverse economic conditions, just as long as the political will existed.

Having achieved high office in Ethiopia, first as Minister of Health (2005-2012) and then as Minister of Foreign Affairs (2012-2017), Dr Tedros facilitated critical health investments and reforms that dramatically expanded healthcare, with particular attention to malaria, TB, HIV/AIDS and women's health. In 2009, he was elected as Chair of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Board and has also previously served as Chair of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership Board, and Co-chair of the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Board. Finally, in 2017, he became the first African to lead the World Health Organization, as well as the first Director-General elected in a vote open to all Member States.

A few statistics to put Dr Tedros' achievements into context. As Minister of Health he invested in 3,500 health centres and 16,000 health posts to improve access to basic healthcare across the country. This helped reduce child mortality by two-thirds, HIV infections by 90%, malaria mortality by 75% and mortality from tuberculosis by 64%. He also increased the number of health professionals from 16,500 to 115,000, and medical school capacity from training 120 doctors per year to nearly 3,000.

In 2011, for his work in the field of public health, he was the first non-American recipient of the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Humanitarian Award. When

DR TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS: MD

reading the citation for this award, I was struck by the intensely practical nature of the work that is required to achieve the visionary goals associated with improved healthcare. In the case of malaria, one key piece of work involved persuading many organizations to provide 20 million insecticide bednets, together with others to distribute them. Ultimately, bednet coverage went from 6% in 2005 to 70% in 2008, with a corresponding drop in the number of cases of malaria. This magnificent achievement was described by Dr John Hardman, former President and CEO of The Carter Centre, as “one of the most ambitious and successful efforts in public health history.”

When looking back on his time reforming Ethiopia’s health system, Dr Tedros noted that “instead of limiting our thinking to what we could do with our existing resources, we set a target of covering everyone, then built the plan to get there...and...pushed the boundaries of what was possible.” I believe we could all take something valuable from this powerful example of seeing beyond overwhelming obstacles whilst remaining focused on ambitious goals.

Health is at the core of so many of the issues we face today, be that climate change, the refugee crisis, and the peace and security of nations. No matter how much progress is made, new challenges arise, and old problems re-emerge. The World Health Organization is still at the heart of the struggle to keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable. The passion and commitment Dr Tedros brings to his leadership position is also shared by our Chancellor, Professor Sir Liam Donaldson, in his own role as Chair of the World Alliance for Patient Safety, and it runs throughout the organization.

As we’ve seen in the news headlines over the last few days the World Health Organization’s health workers are risking their lives every day in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo dealing with the Ebola crisis and related

DR TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS: MD

militia attacks. In the face of such challenges, it's perhaps easy to feel overwhelmed, but more important than ever to remain focused on Dr Tedros' primary goal, as articulated in 2017: "I envision a world where everyone can lead healthy and productive lives, regardless of who they are or where they live."

Mr Chancellor, for his outstanding contributions to healthcare and the inspiration he has given and continues to give to the world, I present to you Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus for the award of Doctor of Medicine, *honoris causa*.

Citation by John Williams,

18th July 2019