

Draft Statement

To be delivered by

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**On behalf of the Group of Friends in Support of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in
Healthcare facilities**

63rd Plenary Meeting
Agenda Item 129: Global Health and Foreign Policy
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Excellencies,

Colleagues,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends in Support of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Healthcare Facilities, composed of Colombia, Egypt, Hungary, Mauritania, Nepal, Poland, Slovenia, and my own country, the Philippines.

The multidimensional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic remains one of the most pressing concerns that we face as it has upended our lives, reversed years of sustainable development gains and deepened inequalities, particularly affecting the most vulnerable.

Our group supports the theme of this year's global health and foreign policy resolution to elevate pandemic prevention, preparedness and response to the highest level of political leadership to ensure that we build back better from current crisis and be better prepared for future health emergencies.

Excellencies,

The COVID-19 pandemic has also revealed the urgent global need for improvement in access to water, sanitation and hygiene services in healthcare facilities. WASH is a first

line of defense against COVID-19 – a virus that thrives amid the inequities in our societies and our health systems. WASH services therefore are crucial in preventing the spread of COVID-19 as well as other diseases and safely treating those infected, and in preventing future pandemics.

Water, sanitation and hygiene services in healthcare facilities are also fundamental for the provision of quality, people-centered care, health security, preparedness and response efforts. Such services reduce exposure to diseases as well as transmission of diseases, and serve to uphold the dignity and human rights of all people, especially people in vulnerable situations including mothers, newborns, children, indigenous people.

WASH in healthcare facilities is critical to prevent the deaths of millions who die because of unsafe, poor quality health care services. The lack of these essential health services impacts nearly 2 billion people, and communities in low-and-middle income countries suffer greatest from this devastating health-care and economic problem.

Recognizing this crisis even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN Secretary General announced a global Call to Action in March 2018 emphasizing that access to WASH in health care facilities (HCF) is fundamental to the achievement of universal health coverage and critical Sustainable Development Goals, encompassing the end to poverty, improved education, reduced inequities, clean water and sanitation, better health and well-being for all.

Investments in and improvements of WASH services will serve as indispensable first line of defense when the next pandemic emerges. WASH in the healthcare facilities is a necessary element for primary health care and foundation for strong health systems. We cannot overemphasize the essential role WASH plays in combating antimicrobial resistance, ensuring infection prevention and control, providing safe environments for maternal and childcare, and the most fundamental criterion in achieving the goal of universal health coverage by the year 2030.

The Philippines and Hungary, as co-Chairs of the GoF in Support of WASH in HCF, and the members of our Group are committed to raising the profile of safe water, sanitation and hygiene and infection prevention and control in health care facilities within the UN.

We invite other Member States to join us in elevating this agenda towards our shared commitment to achieve the SDGs, particularly in this Decade of Action, and in support of elevating the discussions on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response to the highest level of political leadership.

We stand ready to work with other Group of Friends to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages and to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Thank you.