

Opening speech at the Geneva Health Forum
“Precision global health in the digital age“
A forum of innovative practices in global health

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The spoken word is valid

Chers organisateurs du Geneva Health Forum,
Monsieur le Conseiller d'Etat, Chers hôtes,

Honorable Director-General of the World Health Organisation,

Her Excellency, Minister of Health of the Russian Federation,

Distingués invités,
Mesdames et Messieurs,

Merci beaucoup pour cette aimable introduction et l'invitation à participer à cette cérémonie d'ouverture de l'édition 2018 du Geneva Health Forum.

Je profite de cette occasion pour souligner brièvement les grands défis de la santé globale, le potentiel du digital pour y répondre tels que je les perçois mais également le rôle que joue la Suisse dans ces efforts.

The state of health worldwide – where do we stand to date?

Let me start with good news:

The latest Lancet report on the global burden of disease reveals that **today significantly fewer people die than 50 years ago**. They live longer, but due to older age also with different types of ill-health conditions.

Despite uneven **progress** across low- and middle-income countries, **impressive results** could be achieved thanks to international efforts:

1. Over the last 15 years, an estimated 21 million lives have been saved, including 14 million in sub-Saharan Africa;
2. Among them are 9 million children and 500'000 young mothers.

Switzerland has also contributed to these achievements, for example through its support to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

However, we must **continue our efforts** in order to eventually eliminate these diseases and public health threats. Therefore they are still an integral part of the Sustainable Development Goals.

At the same time, there are **new global health risks** that threaten people's lives and restrict mobility and economic activities:

- **Highly infectious diseases with epidemic potential**. In recent years, we have seen how rapidly bird flu, Ebola and Zika have spread, affecting not only individual and public health but also having profound consequences for the social and economic foundations of entire societies. The last Ebola outbreak in West Africa not only claimed 11,000 lives, but also caused an economic damage of 2.8 billion US dollars!

- **Antibiotic resistance.** While in our latitudes we are concerned about hospital-based infections, it is multidrug-resistant tuberculosis in Central Asian countries or South Africa, which affects 480,000 people worldwide.

Zika, multidrug-resistant tuberculosis or sleeping sickness have one thing in common: very often, there are no efficacious and safe diagnostics, vaccines or medicines, because there are hardly any incentives for the pharmaceutical industry to invest.

This situation is slowly changing, also thanks to numerous product development partnerships. These function as platforms for various product-related research and development projects and provide funding of development phases with relatively high risk through public and philanthropic financing. In return, involved pharmaceutical companies provide know-how and commit to affordable prices.

Switzerland supports several of such innovative platforms, among them the Geneva-based:

- Medicines for Malaria Venture
- Foundation for Innovative Diagnostics
- Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative.

Thanks to development gains in many parts of the world, **high-, low- and middle-income countries increasingly face similar health challenges:**

- People are getting older everywhere and increasingly suffer from cancer, diabetes or cardiovascular diseases during their lifetime.
- In 2016, more than 70% of worldwide mortality was attributable to **non-communicable diseases.**
- As we know, risk factors can be reduced through physical activity and adequate nutrition. Although gaining in international attention, this has not yet translated into adequate funding and systemic changes.

The way forward – what do we have to do?

In light of the numerous global health challenges and stagnant Official Development Assistance, we must adjust our approaches:

Firstly, it is critical to **help low and middle-income countries to mobilise more resources for health**, for example through improved tax systems and innovative health financing.

Secondly, the **quality and resilience of health systems must be improved** through more cost-effective resource allocation and know-how transfer.

For both elements, **governance is key.**

SDC supports the mobilisation and efficient allocation of local resources, e.g. through national health financing reforms in Tanzania, Chad or Moldova.

Thirdly, people must be empowered to promote and manage their own health, so that diseases can be avoided.

Digital solutions, the focus of this year's edition, have strong **potential for making health products and services more effective, affordable and people-centered:** For instance they help

- Healthcare providers improve the quality of diagnosis and treatment
- Patients manage chronic diseases.

Le rôle de la coopération Suisse au développement – Que pouvons-nous contribuer à la santé globale?

Il y a trois raisons principales de nous engager dans la santé globale:

1. En tant qu'État membre fondateur de l'Organisation mondiale de la santé, la Suisse s'engage à promouvoir la santé et le bien-être de tous à tous les âges. Au vu de la multitude

de défis, nous sommes convaincus que **chaque contribution est cruciale pour que le droit à la santé devienne enfin une réalité pour tous.**

2. Compte tenu de la nature transfrontalière croissante des risques de santé, **la Suisse a également intérêt à prévenir et à contrôler les maladies hautement infectieuses** ainsi que d'autres problèmes de santé globale.

3. La Suisse a beaucoup à offrir pour la santé globale:

- Des entreprises innovatrices dans le secteur pharmaceutique, des biotechnologies et technologies médicales ;
- Plusieurs centres de recherche et hôpitaux renommés;
- Un système de santé très performant;
- Et la plupart des organisations internationales dans le domaine de la santé, basées ici à Genève.

Tous ces acteurs ont un savoir-faire unique et offrent des produits et services qui contribuent déjà aujourd'hui à la santé mondiale.

En tant qu'agence gouvernementale, la Coopération suisse au développement s'efforce de promouvoir ce savoir-faire et de développer des approches innovantes pour obtenir des **changements systémiques.**

Mais pour avoir un impact, nous avons besoin de **partenariats stratégiques** qui combinent tout ce savoir-faire et les ressources nécessaires.

An example of such a partnership is the openMIS initiative.

The partnership comprises the Swiss and German Development Cooperation, the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute as well as user countries like Tanzania and Nepal.

At the core of this digital innovation is a software for the data management of health insurance or any financing scheme.

This open-access software is freely available and continuously improved by a global community of practice combining IT, health financing and open health information exchange know-how.

This solution, among others, will be presented during the forum.

The Swiss Development Cooperation continuously supports this renowned international forum because it:

- provides space for exchange and mutual learning
- brings researchers, practitioners and policy makers together
- serves as a breeding ground for new partnerships.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If we want to make the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development a success, we need **transformative partnerships** between the North and the South, the private and the public, between research, policy and practice, and between the health and other sectors. Here we count on you!

Je vous souhaite de fructueuses discussions et des échanges productifs lors de ce forum.

Je vous remercie pour votre attention.