

Remarks by President Charles Michel at the Special session of the World Health Assembly

President Michel at World Health Assembly: "Today I hope we will make history"

First, I would like to congratulate you for your courage and for your ambition in organising this special session of the World Health Assembly. This is only the second time in the history of the World Health Organisation that an extraordinary session takes place.

Today I hope we will make history. The situation in the world demands it. As we speak, the world faces yet another wave of Covid-19, a clear reminder of our duty to our citizens and to each other. It is our collective responsibility to never let another pandemic find us unprepared, uncoordinated, or working in isolation from one another. The outcome of this session – and your decisions today – are vital to how we will cooperate in the future and how we will prevent, prepare for, detect, and respond to health threats in the future. As you know, I have been a strong advocate for an international treaty or legally binding instrument on pandemic preparedness.

We need an incremental change in our global health architecture. I want to warmly and sincerely thank you, Dr Tedros, for our excellent cooperation. And I would also like to thank the many leaders and countries that have joined us. All of us – political leaders and leaders of international organisations – must be at the forefront of these global efforts. We must show the world that we can cooperate, build bridges, and find joint solutions. There is no silver bullet. No single way out. And there are no easy solutions in managing the massive challenges of global health threats. But we have already shown that, when we do work together, human ingenuity knows no bounds. Developing vaccines in just ten months is a perfect example. It is nothing short of a miracle.

Now it is time for you, the World Health Assembly, to provide the legal framework for these sustainable solutions. We must guarantee that, if another pandemic strikes, we have the vaccines we need along with all other counter-measures. And just as crucially, we must ensure equitable access to these counter-measures. We simply cannot allow the same inequality we have seen and continue to see to repeat itself in future pandemics. That is why we must act.

We have a unique opportunity to go to the heart of prevention. And I am referring to One Health. This is not just a concept. We must translate it into concrete action and tangible instruments. Scientists expect that 70% of future pandemics will stem from zoonotic diseases, so we must better understand the links between human, animal, and environmental health. The One Health approach is not a luxury. It is a “must-have” for future global health.

Thank you again for your dedication and your efforts to improve global health governance and for your hard work during this pandemic, and your commitment to prevent the next one. The world is counting on you. Together let's take bold

and decisive action. Yesterday's informal agreement is a huge step, and now it's time to capitalise on this momentum to make the world a safer place for all our citizens. I wish you a fruitful and successful session.