

Opening remarks by Foreign Minister MOTEGI Toshimitsu at UHC Friends Group Ministerial Meeting

Mr. Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Dr. Tedros, Director-General of the World Health Organization,

Co-chairs of the Group of Friends of UHC,

This year is the first anniversary of the adoption of the political declaration on the UN General Assembly high level meeting on Universal Health Coverage (UHC), known as “the most comprehensive health agreement to date”. It is very meaningful that the Group of Friends and its partners gather together and discuss UHC in the COVID-19 and towards post-COVID-19 eras. I would like to sincerely welcome yesterday’s release of the United Nations Secretary General’s Policy Brief on COVID-19 and UHC.

In order to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to aim at “leaving no one’s health behind” and achieve UHC, while taking a stand for the principle of “human security”. Japan has led the global support quickly and proactively to achieve UHC, cooperating with other countries under the current human security crisis. Japan provided foreign aid at an unprecedented speed, having contributed over 1.54 billion USD to tackle COVID-19 within the first few months of the pandemic.

There are three points in providing Japan’s assistance:

First, we will strengthen countries' capacity to tackle COVID-19, in particular to research and develop vaccines and other tools, and to ensure equitable access to those tools. Japan announced its financial commitment of approximately 300 million USD to Gavi at the Global Vaccine Summit in June 2020. Today, I would like to announce that Japan will contribute more than 130 million USD of that commitment for the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC), in order to enable lower income countries to reinforce equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. In addition, we will advance multilateral cooperation schemes such as ACT Accelerator, and we will also suggest the expansion of access to diagnostics through the Global Fund as well as the supply of therapeutics through the Patent Pool.

Second, we must strengthen health systems, preparing for future health crises. For example, in Viet Nam, we helped to reinforce community health systems by establishing core medical facilities in cities. These facilities play a central role in tackling infectious diseases together with a network of community health providers. In addition, we will strengthen disease surveillance systems through human resource development for infectious disease testing and research. Ensuring sustainable health financing and its adequate allocation are necessary to conduct these measures and to achieve UHC.

Third, we have to generate an enabling environment for health security. Japan will support the cross-sectoral activities in such fields including nutrition, water and sanitation, cooperating with the private sector and other actors, and to expand primary health care as well. Currently, as food insecurity increases due to COVID-19, malnutrition and growth stunting are on the rise. In response to these issues, Japan is

supporting twelve African countries for improving nutrition.

We will reinforce our measures to achieve UHC in Africa, toward the 8th Tokyo International Conference for African Development (TICAD8) to be held in 2022. Also, nutrition is fundamental cornerstone of public health and goes hand-in-hand with UHC. We will host the Tokyo Nutrition Growth Summit in the latter half of 2021 and commit to strengthening global efforts for improving nutrition.

Japan overcame the aftermath and impoverishment that followed the Second World War by adopting a nation-wide health insurance system and thereby achieving UHC. As a result, we realized economic development, favorable health status and longevity. Our resilient health system has proven instrumental in tackling and controlling COVID-19 crisis. Once again, I would like to emphasize the importance of UHC in the COVID-19 and towards post-COVID-19 eras in order to “leave no one’s health behind”. Japan remains committed to realizing UHC, together with the international community.

Thank you.