

## Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Friends of Universal Health Coverage Statement by Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa

Distinguished guests, dear colleagues and friends, thank you for participating in the Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Friends of Universal Health Coverage.

I am very pleased to be able to co-host this meeting in-person for the first time.

The spread of COVID-19 has exposed vulnerabilities in equitable access to health care throughout the world. This reality highlights the importance of strengthening and accelerating efforts to achieve UHC, in a spirit of “leaving no one’s health behind”.

However, at present, half of the world’s population does not have access to basic health services, including response to COVID-19. Under such conditions, human security is threatened, and the economic and social development of nations are hampered.

Through the COVID-19 crisis, it hit home to the world that investment in health systems is critical to strengthening the foundation of resilient economies and societies.

It is necessary to make use of the momentum that we have obtained from COVID-19 to strengthen efforts to achieve UHC.

With a view to achieving UHC, Japan has led the global COVID-19 response in three pillars.

First, overcoming the current COVID-19 crisis.

Second, strengthening health systems to prevent, prepare for, and respond to future health crises.

And, third, addressing a wide range of health challenges, including traditional infectious diseases, to build better health security.

In the fight against COVID-19, Japan has provided approximately \$5 billion to support efforts in low-middle-income countries.

Particularly, Japan has taken leadership in ensuring equitable access to vaccines, which is key to the containment of COVID-19, including through up to \$1.5 billion of financial support for the COVAX facility.

In addition, Japan announced a pledge to contribute up to 1.08 billion dollars over the next three years to the Global Fund, in order to contribute to measures against the three major infectious diseases and to strengthen health systems with a view to achieving UHC.

Strengthening health systems in normal times towards achieving UHC is essential in order to beef up prevention, preparedness, and response (PPR) for future health crises. Japan has taken action on this conviction.

For instance, in Ghana, Japan has a longstanding financial and technical cooperation with the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research. In the COVID-19 context, it was able to provide PCR testing not only in Ghana but also in nine neighboring countries, thanks to the human resources and testing systems strengthened by Japan's contributions.

In Vietnam, the medical network of the core hospitals established with Japanese cooperation over the years have served as the foundation of the COVID-19 response.

Japan has been fully supporting the ASEAN Center for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED) towards its full-scale operation, both financially and through technical assistance. Japan will continue to support the center's activities, including through dispatching our experts.

Next year, Japan will host the G7 Hiroshima Summit.

Having experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, now is the time to learn from its lessons, build better global health architecture, and once again, strengthen global momentum toward achieving UHC.

The Group of Friends of UHC was created by Japan and several other like-minded countries. This Group worked to bring about an agreement to achieve UHC by the leaders of all UN member states at the High Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on UHC here in New York three years ago. It was just before the COVID-19 outbreak.

A year from now, the leaders of all UN member states will gather their wisdom to discuss UHC and PPR again at the UN General Assembly.

Based on the Global Health Strategy formulated in May, Japan is determined to continue to lead G7 and international efforts, including discussions on how to promote UHC in the post-COVID-19 era.

Japan looks forward to working closely with UHC friends.