

Your excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Agenda, countries agreed to a historic and urgent need to accelerate efforts towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. No country can afford to step back from responding to HIV and no one should be left behind.

Sexual and reproductive health of the people and particularly of young people and other vulnerable communities, rely on national political commitment. In the Republic of Macedonia, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has invested for more than a decade. The established infrastructure and programs made a significant contribution in maintaining the low HIV prevalence.

However, in the majority of countries in European region and especially in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, the Global Fund phased out the financial support. While some countries are transitioning from donor to domestic financing, there are countries that are still lacking behind. Unfortunately, in some countries the transition was not successful and did not continue the established programs which left many people without the essential HIV services.

We as the Republic of Macedonia, demonstrated firm political commitment and successful transition after the Global Fund phased out. As of 2018, the Government of Republic of Macedonia has fully overtaken the funding of the HIV prevention and treatment with a budget of 1.5 million euros. We became a leader in the region in terms of state budget financing of the national HIV response.

Furthermore, taking into consideration the low contraceptive prevalence our government had committed to ensure that at least one modern contraceptive method is included in the basic health insurance coverage. Contraception is more than protecting women from unplanned pregnancy; it is their right and we need to ensure that women are empowered to exercise their reproductive health rights.

In addition, this year the Ministry of Health adopted the National Sexual and Reproductive Action Plan for the next three years to improve the availability of and accessibility to sexual and reproductive health services. The national action plan reaffirms the government's firm commitment to implement Agenda 2030, and particularly contribute in advancing Goal 3 on Healthy lifestyle and Goal 5 on Gender equality. Gender equality and empowerment of girls and women will not be possible without realization of their sexual and reproductive health rights.

As we continue to work to improve the prevention and treatment of HIV and access to and utilization of sexual and reproductive health services, we recognize the importance of

partnering with the civil society organizations. Services provided by civil society and community-based organizations to reach the affected people are increasingly recognized as an integral part of the country's health and social system. We appreciate their commitment during the past years and we continue the good work together.

Last but not least, we have a major task to accomplish, and that is to end AIDS epidemic by 2030. The time is now!, and we all need to increase our political efforts in order to ensure that countries have sustainable funding and resources to respond to HIV and to ensure universal access to prevention, treatment and care, based on the human rights approach!

Thank you!