

Hon. Sec. Mutahi Kagwe  
Cabinet Secretary for Health  
Ministry of Health  
Afya House, Cathedral Road  
P O Box 30016–00100  
**Nairobi, Kenya.**

11<sup>th</sup> November 2020

### **Strengthening the TB Response in Kenya, Amid COVID-19**

Dear Hon. Mutahi Kagwe,

We, at Stop TB Partnership, together with the undersigned civil society organizations in Kenya, are contacting you to share our perspectives in advance of the upcoming UN General Assembly Special Session in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, due to take place in early December 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the entire world, and the international community has mobilized to meet the enormous challenge it presents. We welcome the decision of the General Assembly to hold a Special Session to address this important issue and discuss the way forward for the coming months and years.

Notwithstanding the multiple, serious impacts of COVID-19, tuberculosis (TB) remains the world's deadliest airborne infectious disease, causing 1.4 million deaths every year. In Kenya's statement to the Special Session, we wish to kindly encourage you to **highlight the situation of people with TB and call on your fellow Member States to step up efforts to achieve the targets agreed at the UN High-Level Meeting on TB in September 2018.**

With two years to the deadline of 2022, the world is, unfortunately, not on track to fulfil these important commitments; on quality prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care of tuberculosis, from all sources, and increasing overall global investments for ending tuberculosis to at least US\$13 billion a year by 2022. We believe it is important for Kenya to take the opportunity to signal your political commitment to get the TB response back on track and ensure that COVID-19 does not contribute to additional preventable deaths, sickness, and hardship resulting from TB.

The challenge presented by COVID-19 has caused a rollback in the achievements on TB to date. A modelling study found that this could result in an additional 6.3 million cases of TB between 2020 and 2025, and an additional 1.4 million TB deaths. The study was conducted by the United Nations-hosted Stop TB Partnership (STBP) together with the Imperial College, Avenir Health, Johns Hopkins University, and USAID. A recent civil society report presents the community perspective on the topic and makes it clear that, to recover lost ground and reach our shared UN HLM TB commitments, we will need to redouble our efforts.

We note that Stop TB Partnership recommends that countries maintain and scale up TB services using new diagnostic, treatment, and prevention tools, digital health tools and community/home-based care. STBP also recommends that countries integrate TB and COVID-19 testing and tracing and strengthen efforts to overcome the barriers that people continue to face when accessing TB services. The UNGA Special Session on COVID-19 presents an excellent opportunity to highlight the potential benefits of such an integrated approach.

Moreover, in our national TB response, we call on you to:

- Fund and strengthen integrated TB and COVID-19 mitigation and response measures, with simultaneous screening and diagnostics;
- Scale up TB services without any disruption, and include comprehensive, inclusive, accessible social protection;
- Ensure our TB response is people-centered, prioritizing community-led monitoring, peer support, and the elimination of stigma and discrimination; and
- Invest in research, development, innovative approaches, digital technology, and artificial intelligence to improve TB tracing, prevention, and treatment, with real-time TB data including TB key population data.

These measures are in line with UNGA resolution A/RES/74/306 on a comprehensive and coordinated response to COVID-19, adopted on 11 September 2020, which calls upon Member States to strengthen efforts to address tuberculosis and other communicable diseases; as part of universal health coverage and to ensure that the fragile gains are sustained and expanded by advancing comprehensive approaches and integrated service delivery, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to Evaline Kibuchi, Chief National Coordinator Stop TB Partnership Kenya on +254 722 319 981 or ekibuchi@stoptbkenya.org for further information or advice to support this request.

Yours Faithfully,

Evaline Kibuchi  
Chief National Coordinator  
Stop TB Partnership Kenya

