

# Alok Sharma speech to UN General Assembly on Universal Health Coverage

I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly and colleagues from Thailand and Georgia for leading the Political Declaration on Universal Health Coverage.

Today, we renew our commitment to that goal.

It is an ambitious and vital commitment.

The UK has a world-class health system. For over 70 years, our National Health Service has delivered safe healthcare free at the point of use to the British people. We fully support international efforts on universal health coverage.

This is urgent. Every day around 800 women around the world die needlessly in childbirth or through unsafe pregnancies – all because of a lack of basic healthcare.

The UK is committed to defending and promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights. Women and girls must have control over their bodies, and access to services they need.

We cannot achieve Universal Health Coverage without Universal Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

I am therefore very pleased to announce a £600 million Reproductive Health Supplies programme. This will help 20 million women and girls to access family planning and prevent five million unintended pregnancies each year up to 2025.

This builds on the UK's long-standing commitment to gender equality. As Employment Minister, I worked with the International Labour Organization to address violence in the workplace. We likewise know that effective health services reduce violence against women and girls.

Universal health coverage is a smart investment. Not just for health, but for all the Global Goals. It reduces poverty and drives prosperity.

We cannot afford not to do this.

But we must turn our political commitment into action.

Countries must invest public resources in universal health coverage to protect the poorest. This means addressing causes of illness and death like malnutrition and unsafe water and sanitation, and the threat posed by antimicrobial resistance. We must spend carefully to help as many people as possible.

We need systems that can protect everyone. I have seen for myself Ebola outbreaks being made worse by weak and fractured health systems.

This needs good infrastructure, strong systems and services.

We know what it takes. We have committed to do it. Let's now act to make universal health coverage a reality.

Thank you.