

UK Health and Social Care Secretary address at World Health Assembly

We gather here today in a peaceful European city with no need to fear the sound of incoming missiles or artillery or to fear rape and execution at the hands of invading troops.

Just a few months ago, the people of another European city, enjoyed peace and security too.

But now, Mariupol has been completely destroyed by Russian troops, just like many other towns and villages in Ukraine.

As a group of nations we cannot be pro health, pro humanity, without being against such brutal violence.

Not least when at least 200 health facilities and workers have been attacked by Russia – as verified by the WHO.

So it is absolutely right that we vote on a motion condemning President Putin's unjustifiable aggression.

And I welcome the deeply felt concern expressed by the Director General's opening address about the tragic impact of war.

But we know that speaking words in the comfort of a conference centre is the easy bit.

So I want to pay tribute to all the healthcare workers – including WHO staff who risk their lives in conflicts and crises, like we are witnessing in Ukraine today, some of whom pay the ultimate sacrifice, as we have witnessed in Afghanistan.

As it turns 75 next year, the WHO is more important than ever.

I congratulate Dr Tedros on his nomination for a second term leading this vital institution.

Working together, I know there is much we can achieve – and there is much to do.

Nearly two and a half years since the pandemic began the moment has come where the talk of 'learning lessons' must turn to concrete actions.

I'm pleased the intergovernmental negotiating body on a new instrument is in full swing.

This process has the UK's full support.

Only by working together will we emerge stronger.

Allied to that effort is the 100-day target the mission to make safe and effective vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics available within 100 days of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) being declared.

We must rise to meet future health emergencies by supporting speedy science.

To do that, it's time for a step change in how we do clinical trials across borders – especially when it comes to sharing data and standards.

We need stronger national clinical trial capabilities, greater collaboration, and sharper prioritisation of health needs.

And I'm proud to present a resolution on Clinical Trials to this World Health Assembly alongside our Co-Chair Argentina.

Because vaccines were a product of clinical trials and selfless volunteers just as much as they were a coalition of industry, science and government.

Clinical trials will also be vital in future health challenges including the 'silent pandemic' of antimicrobial resistance, which represents a huge existential threat.

With health threats like this, just as with the global pandemic, we're all on the same side.

We must draw on expertise and experience wherever we find it.

So in that spirit of One Health, there is clearly no health basis to justify not including Taiwan as an observer to the WHA and to be given meaningful access to all relevant technical meetings not least because of the role they have played in sharing information with the rest of the world since the very beginning of Covid-19.

A strengthened global response to pandemics also requires a strengthened WHO.

At this WHA, the best way we can show our support for the WHO is by approving the financing and reform package on the table.

I call on my fellow health ministers to join me in backing these measures.

And to live up to our values of global peace, cooperation and inclusion.

Thank you.