

**Statement to the 136th Session of the WHO Executive Board on agenda item 10.1 “Strengthening emergency and essential surgical care and anesthesia as a component of universal health coverage”**

Thank you, Chair, for giving me the opportunity of addressing the distinguished Members of the Executive Board on behalf of Medicus Mundi International and the People’s Health Movement.

We appreciate the initiative of the WHO on emergency and essential surgical care and anesthesia, especially in the context of access to safe surgical care at the primary level, and the appropriate training and retention of the health workforce. Strengthening capacity to deliver basic surgical and anesthetic services at first referral facilities is essential to reduce death and disability and support progress towards universal health care.

We urge MSs to ensure that this initiative is integrated into the Primary Health Care system, avoiding new vertical programs. It is necessary to explore and evaluate evidence-based, long-term options which respond to the local and national context.

The initiative will need to be accompanied by an elaboration of a decentralized and networked health system organized around the principles of comprehensive primary health care. Developing models of service delivery will involve identifying appropriate availability of surgical care at different levels of the health system, commensurate with local capacity and infrastructure and augmented, where necessary, by mobile surgical teams.

Suitable measures to address the issue of health workforce migration and carefully designed training programs for practitioners are key to the success of this initiative.

Finally, the success of this initiative will depend on development of rational criteria for selection of procedures that are appropriate at each level of care, and which adequately address concerns related to efficacy, quality and safety. Negative experiences in high income countries of over-specialisation and inappropriate and irrational introduction of high cost procedures which drive up cost of care need to be studied while framing policies to promote sustainable access to essential and emergency surgical care. Thank you.

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