

## **Transcript for Tedros Voices of UMass Chan Podcast**

A new *Voices of UMass Chan* podcast episode highlights the keynote speech by WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, PhD, at the recent celebratory ribbon cutting of UMass Chan Medical Schools's new education and research building on June 7. Dr. Adhanom Ghebreyesus' full speech can be read below.

*This transcript was created using speech recognition software. While it has been reviewed by the Office of Communications, it may contain errors.*

### **MUSIC**

#### **Voice over artist**

Thank you for listening to the *Voices of UMass Chan*, featuring the people, ideas and advances of UMass Chan Medical School.

### **MUSIC**

#### **Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, PhD**

I offer my congratulations to you, and to the entire school community, on the opening of this building. Although the building is new, its twin purposes – education and research – are not. They have always been central to the mission of this School, just as they have always been central to improvements in health globally, and to our work at the World Health Organization.

I note that this building is designed to facilitate expanded class sizes to meet growing workforce needs, in Massachusetts and beyond. I also note that just a few days ago, the school graduated the largest class in its history. Congratulations to all graduates. It would have been an honor for me to receive my honorary degree with you, but the World Health Assembly only finished at midnight on Saturday and was followed by a board meeting.

I'm particularly pleased to note the school's emphasis on primary care, which is the essential foundation of any health system. WHO estimates that about 90 percent of essential health services can be delivered at the primary health care level. And yet for too long, too many countries have focused their investments on advanced medical care in high-tech hospitals, but neglected investments in primary health care. Certainly, high-quality secondary and tertiary care are very important. But investments in primary health care are the most cost effective, in terms of the returns delivered in preventing or delaying the need for more costly secondary and tertiary care.

A primary health care approach is also vital for addressing the drivers of disease in the food people eat, the air they breathe and the conditions in which they live. And as the eyes and ears of the health system, primary health care is also essential for preventing, detecting and responding to outbreaks at the earliest stage. But of course, primary care does not deliver itself. Vaccines do not administer themselves; caesarean sections do not perform themselves; and care, compassion and kindness do not deliver themselves.

They all require a person – and not just any person – they require a health or care worker. The simple truth is that there is no health without health and care workers. Certainly, artificial intelligence and other technologies offer huge potential for research, and for diagnosis, treatment and service delivery. One of our priorities at WHO is supporting countries to harness the power of technology for health. But nothing will ever replace a health worker.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed us just how important they are. And yet globally, we are facing a shortage of 10 million health and care workers to achieve the health-related targets in the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Unsurprisingly, the biggest gaps are in the poorest countries, although it's a challenge you face here in the U.S. as well, as populations age and health needs grow.

That's why one of our other initiatives has been to develop the WHO Academy in Lyon, France, which we will open in December this year. I'm glad to invite Mike to join us. It will be a game changer. Our aim is that the WHO Academy will become a global center for lifelong learning in health, and for building capacities for the health and care workforce globally, as well as for WHO's own workforce. The building is beautiful, but I admit this is more beautiful.

## **LAUGHS FROM AUDIENCE**

Our aim is not to compete with other academic and health institutions, but rather to collaborate and complement them through partnerships. So, Chancellor Collins, we would very much welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how the WHO Academy could partner with UMass Chan Medical School, to leverage your expertise and experience for the world.

So, just as this new building will provide a platform for education, so too it will provide a platform for building on the school's impressive track record in research – in HIV, cancer, diabetes, infectious disease, and in understanding the molecular basis of disease.

And of course, Dr. Craig Mello's Nobel Prize-winning research on RNA interference has opened the door to new treatments against many diseases. I'm pleased to see the school continues to

build on Dr. Mello's work, including through the RNA Therapeutics Institute and the Gene Therapy Center.

Research has given us so many solutions to so many health challenges. Research has given us vaccines, antibiotics and other medicines, with which we can prevent, diagnose and treat diseases that were once a death sentence. Research has helped us to identify the cause of diseases that were once a mystery, like malaria, TB, HIV, cervical cancer and more. Research has enabled us to peer ever further into what makes us human – to map our genome, and even to edit it, thanks to the research of Dr. Mello, one of yours, and others.

And research continues to push back the boundaries of the impossible and the unknown. The key challenge we face is to ensure that the fruits of research are available to all people; that they serve to narrow inequalities, rather than widen them. The COVID-19 pandemic was a perfect example. The development and approval of multiple safe and effective vaccines in less than a year was a triumph for science and research. But inequitable access to those vaccines globally was a stain on our collective conscience. This should not be repeated.

At the World Health Assembly in Geneva last week, the nations of the world took decisive steps towards making the world safer, and more equitable. A good step forward. Based on lessons learned from the pandemic, they adopted an important set of amendments to the International Health Regulations – the instrument of international law that governs the global response to health emergencies.

They also agreed to extend negotiations for another year on a new Pandemic Agreement. Initially, countries had committed to finalizing the Agreement in time for last week's Health Assembly, and although they came a long way, they were not able to reach consensus in time.

The two-year timeframe they gave themselves was extremely ambitious. The fact that they came as close as they did in just two years is frankly incredible. Because as you know, international agreements, laws take many, many more years. If they complete negotiations this year, or by next May at the latest, that's what they have agreed, it would still be a giant achievement in very short time.

They have committed to doing that for two reasons: First, because they believe they can, and will, reach agreement; And second, because they believe the Pandemic Agreement is still needed urgently, because history teaches us that the next pandemic is a matter of when, not if. However, the negotiations have been undermined by a torrent of mis- and disinformation, including false claims that nations will cede sovereignty to WHO. Which is not true. So, I ask all

of you to speak up for the Pandemic Agreement, and to speak out against mis- and disinformation – because this Agreement belongs to you, it belongs to all of us. It’s about making the world safer for everyone.

Dear friends, Dr. Mello said, “I want to make a difference in the world because I believe that’s what science is for.” And that’s what this building is for. I think Mike said this building will hopefully change the course of history of disease. Exactly. And not education for the sake of education; Not research for the sake of research. But education and research to make a difference in our world to save lives, to prevent suffering, and to close inequities. That’s what this building is for, and that’s what the work that we do at WHO is all about. We share the same purpose. We were founded 76 years ago, in 1948, as the world emerged from the devastation of the Second World War.

Like the United Nations of which we are part, WHO was born of the recognition that the only alternative to global conflict was global cooperation. Our Constitution was the first instrument of international law to affirm that the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental right for all people, without distinction, a fundamental human right. And as Mike said, because I very often say this, not a privilege for some or for most; it is a right for all. That is the right for which WHO will continue to work. And that is the right that I hope and expect this building will serve.

Thank you once again for this great honor. And thank you for your commitment to promoting, providing and protecting the health of the people of Massachusetts, and the United States, and the world. Thank you.

## **AUDIENCE APPLAUSE**

### **Voice over artist**

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### **Music**

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