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MEDIA RELEASE

Virtual summit marking Universal Health Coverage Day 2020, echoes its theme of “Health for All: Protect Everyone” with a series of commitments by global leaders to improve the health of women, children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

More than 2000 delegates from over 100 countries will convene for the virtual [*Lives in the Balance: Improving the health of women, children and adolescents through Universal Health Coverage*](#) summit on 11 December, 2020.

They will take stock of how the COVID-19 has affected progress towards achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC), launch new commitments towards improving the health of women, children and adolescents, and galvanize a participatory approach from all stakeholders to ensure we can ‘do better’ during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Lives in the Balance is being staged to mark **Universal Health Coverage Day** on Saturday, 12 December, which calls upon all nations to provide affordable, quality health care for all of their citizens. The theme of this year’s day is “*Health for All: Protect Everyone - To end this crisis and build a safer and healthier future, we must invest in health systems that protect us all — now*”, putting emphasis on making sure no one - and in particular no woman, child or adolescent - is left behind.

Delegates attending the *Lives in the Balance* summit, which includes representation from governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions,

health professional associations, youth-led organizations, and grass-roots campaign groups, will have the opportunity to:

- **Reflect** on progress and challenges towards achieving country commitments for UHC and the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health in the context of COVID-19;
- **Share** lessons about what has and hasn't worked during the crisis in the protection and expansion of health services, actions towards better health financing for UHC, the development of inclusive and participatory and multi-stakeholder platforms, and a stronger integration of gender equality and youth engagement into plans, policies and programmes; and
- **Collaborate** to achieve inclusive and participatory governance driven by social participation, including through the meaningful engagement of women and young people;
- **Act** together to realize the High-Level Declaration on UHC (2019) and the PMNCH Call to Action on COVID-19 (2020), including launching political commitments to our key COVID-19 Call to Action asks.

This half-day summit, jointly convened by the **Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH)**, **UHC2030** and **CORE Group**, builds on the very successful [Lives in the Balance: A COVID-19 Summit](#), in July 2020, where a range of partners came together to call on global leaders to commit to PMNCH's [seven-point action plan](#) for improving and increasing investment in health systems and social protection policies for women, children and adolescents as the world rebuilds in the wake of the pandemic.

"COVID-19 is a stark reminder that there is no health security without universal health coverage. And we can't make progress on UHC unless we double down on efforts to cover every woman, every child and every adolescent," said Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and Board Chair of PMNCH.

"Public health and primary care provide the first line of defense against outbreaks. It all comes full circle."

At this summit, countries including **Afghanistan, India, Kenya, Liberia, Mexico** and **Nigeria** will announce domestic policy and financial commitments to improve the health of women, children and adolescents as part of the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Donor countries, including **Canada, Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom** and the **USA**, and the **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**, will also pledge further support in this critical area of global health and development, which is vital to the achievement of UHC.

UHC2030 will also present key findings from its recent [State of commitment to universal health coverage; synthesis 2020](#), which charts current global progress one year on from the groundbreaking UN High Level Meeting which reaffirmed world governments' commitment to achieving UHC and ensuring healthy lives and wellbeing for all by 2030. Those global leaders met in an atmosphere of optimism and ambition that had rarely been witnessed before. Just a few months later, however, the entire planet was hit by COVID-19, an unprecedented health and economic crisis which shattered those expectations.

“Findings from the UHC2030’s review of the state of UHC commitment show how, in many countries, poor and vulnerable groups are being further left behind, and inequities are widening due to the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Dr Githinji Gitahi, Group CEO Amref Health Africa & Co-Chair of UHC2030.

“The COVID-19 pandemic is also exposing and exacerbating weaknesses in health systems, showing that many governments – rich and poor - neglected to invest in health, social safety nets and emergency preparedness when it really mattered: before a crisis struck.”

Around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic is having a huge impact on health systems, economies and the lives, livelihoods and well-being of people and communities. Recent [forecasts](#) indicate that COVID-19 may push 71 million people back into extreme poverty in 2020, in what would be the first rise in global poverty in more than 20 years (since 1998). Another [study](#) estimated that 6.7 million additional children could suffer from wasting in 2020, compared with projections without COVID-19, due to abrupt decreases in household incomes, disruptions to the supply of affordable, nutritious foods, and interruptions to health, nutrition and social protection services.

The impact of the pandemic on the world’s most vulnerable women, children and adolescents will be even more pronounced, as funding for services in this area of healthcare were already insufficient, long before COVID-19 struck, as detailed in a recent [Every Women Every Child 2020 Progress Report](#).

Disruptions in essential services are now translating into real-world evidence of decreasing sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health outcomes, which go beyond the modelled estimates predicted at the beginning of the outbreak. New findings from the [Global Finance Facility](#) show that disruptions due to COVID-19 resulted in a 35% drop in the number of children fully vaccinated in Liberia, 11% in Afghanistan and 13% in Nigeria, three countries that will be making commitments at the summit. In Nepal, [evidence](#) shows how reductions in institutional childbirths during the COVID-19 lockdown has led to increased rates of stillbirth and newborn mortality.

“Great progress has been made in recent years to improve health and well-being, including for women, children and adolescents, and to expand UHC,” said Lisa M Hilmi, Executive Director, CORE Group.

“COVID-19 has demonstrated that progress can be fragile, however, and must be protected. This summit will provide a space for reflection, exchange of best practices, renewed commitment to collaboration and action, and mutual accountability.”

To view the global summit live, visit [here](#) from 08-00 - 11-00 EST / 14-00 - 17-00 CET / 18-30 – 21-30 IST on Friday, 11 December, 2020.

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