The “right to health” is indivisible and universal. While we are facing a multitude of challenges at the interface of environment and health, the good news is: we do not have to reinvent the wheel! We can maximize the health benefits from national and international environment and health policies. But this takes political will.

Experience in my own country has shown that simple measures can harbor substantial co-benefits for the environment and health. Let me highlight two examples:

- It is well-known that Switzerland disposes of excellent water – but this has not always been the case. In the 1970s, due to heavy pollution, it was not recommendable to swim in certain Swiss lakes and rivers. Since then, stringent legislation regarding the protection of water resources has led to significant improvements for both the environment and health.

- Moreover, air pollution claims 3000 deaths annually in Switzerland. We have been taking measures both in the area of mitigation and adaptation. At the local level, for example, a mobile application to monitor the air pollution burden allows our citizens to make smart choices regarding when best to exercise outdoors.

Political will has also been demonstrated in a number of recently adopted international agreements and frameworks. Yet, their potential has not been fully exploited:

- In the area of climate change, the Paris Agreement can be a milestone for the protection of human health – but only if it is implemented effectively. Last week, our Parliament approved of the Paris Agreement. Hence, Switzerland is moving one step closer towards its ratification. It will be crucial to consider the right to health in all climate-related actions.
• Moreover, at the 4th Meeting of Parties of the Protocol on Water and Health last November in Bern, a new three-year program was adopted. We look forward to its implementation and call upon all parties who have not done so yet to consider acceding to the Protocol.

• Finally, the adoption of the Minamata Convention: this is another important step towards a future free of damage to human health and the environment resulting from mercury. Switzerland hosts the main international institutions and conventions relevant for chemicals and waste management. Therefore, it is our pleasure to welcome you to the first Conference of Parties of the Minamata Convention this September in Geneva.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We can do much for health by drawing from existing policies. This Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health provides a unique opportunity for intersectoral collaboration in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We commend the alignment of the Ostrava Ministerial Declaration with the greater UN framework and look forward to its adoption tomorrow.

Thank you.

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