



46th Union World Conference on Lung Health Welcome Speech
José Luis Castro, Executive Director, The Union
Inaugural Session, 3 December 2015
Cape Town, South Africa

Mr. Minister of Health (Dr Aaron Motsoaledi)
Honored guests.
Members of The Union.
Representatives of Civil Society Organisations.

Dear colleagues,

The Union World Conference on Lung Health is pleased to be here again in South Africa. We have returned to stand with the courageous men and women of this beautiful country, our brothers and sisters, to tell them, "You are not alone in fighting the battle against tuberculosis, HIV, and the health crises you face.

We are here to help. To raise our voices. To let the world know we stand united with you. To show our respect for a people who truly understand the meaning of the word "commitment." And to remember and echo Nelson Mandela's words: "It always seems impossible. . . until it's done."

Members and colleagues from around the world, more than four thousand of you from 120 countries will participate in our conference. You are here because you understand that defeating tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and tobacco will take hard work and determination. It will take skill. You have come because you are committed to our fight.

This is a pivotal World Conference on Lung Health. We are moving into a new era for global development, for global health, for TB and lung health. The world has committed to ending TB by 2035. And the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals include for the first time non-communicable diseases like cancer, heart disease and diabetes. And recognition that tobacco control, which is a major driver of these diseases, must be a priority.

The World Health Organization's End TB Strategy is entering its first year of implementation, and The Stop TB Partnership's new Global Plan to End TB – a five-year plan to help implement the global strategy – is opening its next phase. So it is a new era of action, of urgency.

Our conference theme is "A New Agenda: Lung Health Beyond 2015" – a theme that challenges us to respond, with resolve to act. Through the next five days, I encourage you keep our theme in mind and these five imperatives:

First: We must build political will and engagement to ensure increased resources and well-prepared health systems.

Second: Drug-resistant TB. Many countries remain ill prepared against this epidemic. Existing treatment methods remain intolerably long and difficult and not successful enough.

Third: the TB-HIV and TB-diabetes co-epidemics. If we don't, these crises will push communities into suffering, disability, death and poverty. This is a global development issue.

Fourth: We need new tools to fight these epidemics. And we need to be innovative, unafraid to test new ideas. We must transform lung health globally.

Fifth: To end TB, we need a paradigm shift in our response to it. I believe this conference is where that will come to life. That paradigm shift calls for a larger tent, full of all stakeholders playing their part to end TB with renewed energy and with greater resources.

What we see and learn here will guide us.

We will receive research updates on the new regimen for treating multidrug resistant TB – one that could reduce treatment length from 24 months to 9 months. This will be a game changer.

We will hear reports on TB in prison, a health emergency in many countries that we must address now.

We will learn about significant and largely undetected TB strains originating in animal populations that are now affecting people. This is a very worrisome development.

Earlier this week, we hosted the Global TB Summit, a gathering of parliamentarians from 30 countries to support our effort to end tuberculosis. We will focus attention on key affected populations. Imbizo is a space here, within our conference, for all communities affected by lung health to gather and share. I urge everyone to visit Imbizo frequently.

We are all here, the finest minds and leadership in our global community – researchers, doctors, civil society, policy-makers, patient advocates, industry and the media.

Together, we will forge this paradigm shift using our collective knowledge, evidence and experiences.

Finally, As you walk through this conference venue, you will see a photo exhibit of TB survivors from across the globe. Take a moment to see them. Read their stories. They represent everything we strive for – courage, hope and resilience.

Let's start a new journey in South Africa, the setting of one of the greatest struggles in human history. One that started with huge challenges, as did the fight against TB a century ago.

May we rise to conduct our struggle with the same determination and spirit that the people of this great land brought to theirs.

Remember: "It always seems impossible . . . until it's done."

Thank you, and have a great conference.