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Ladies and gentlemen,

In the midst of the many discussions about the political and programmatic aspects of NCDs it is good to see the NCD Alliance dedicating some time to reflection on the need for us to unite to address the problem. I see uniting as representing acting together in concert and not necessarily becoming one indivisible whole: as the Mexicans would say: juntos pero no revueltos—together but not mixed up. One of the most widely quoted sayings about this virtue of uniting was made by Benjamin Franklin at the signing of the American Declaration of independence. He said: “Gentlemen, we must all hang together, or assuredly we shall hang separately.” There must be few people today who do not instinctively see or at least profess to see the virtue in unity, collaboration and partnerships for a worthy cause. And what is that cause? It is no more, no less than future of those with NCD and risk of developing them who are marginalized, victimized and frequently pauperized.

Partnerships are mentioned in almost every document about NCDs. WHO has as one of the six objectives of the 2008-2013 Action Plan “To promote partnerships for the prevention and control of NCDs” and details actions for the member states, for the Secretariat and the international partners. The call for partnerships is applicable to a wide range of interests and organizations which have stake in NCDs and should unite in their efforts. There should be unity in the sense of unity of purpose at the level of the UN organizations and I hope to see more evidence of effort to have them involved at the highest levels. UNICEF, UNDP and FAO are naturals, but I hope to see ILO involved as well given the thrust to involve business and their acceptance of the importance of workplace wellness.

Yes, there should be unity among organizations. But equally there must be unity between and among different groups of people—the young must make common cause with the old—the sick must align themselves with the well—the rich must ally themselves with the poor and those who wind to soca must embrace those who gyrate to samba.

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But in the more specific case of the NGOs, recent history has shown the value of partnerships and unity in the work of the NCD Alliance. The NGOs which formed the Alliance could see that there were risk factors in common, strengthening of health systems would benefit all their constituents and although there would be specificity of the necessary essential medicines, there is commonality of procurement and distribution systems. But more important is the power of the legions of affiliates at the local and regional level. The worth of the regional partnership has been shown tangibly by the work and growth of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition. There is room for these coalitions at the national level and I was pleased to note the advocacy efforts of the Australians for Global Action on NCDs.

I would make the case for a specific and deliberate plan to strengthen these partnerships and alliances which can clearly claim much credit for the HLM. A plan is urgently needed to counter the fissiparous tendencies that occur after every cooperative action has accomplished some major achievement. We in the Caribbean know about fissiparous tendencies. My generation saw the dissolution of a federation which to many of us was a political holy grail and there is continuous struggle to maintain a regional enterprise.

Let me outline some of the stresses that may impede the development of partnerships and unity.

They occur because of a natural tendency for disorder or entropy to increase in all partnerships and networks over time and that can only be overcome by the input of energy from outside the system. The difficulty with the general claim for partnerships is that it is rarely made clear what the source of that energy is. In the case of the NCD Alliance, that energy comes from the human, managerial and financial resources available.

Another cause of stress is the different characteristics in terms of history, size, prominence etc. of those which would wish to form partnerships and unite. There is historical reference to the difficulties of yoking different animals to the plough. But in spite of different mandates, I contend that it is always possible to have effective collaboration, partnerships and unity of action if the three conditions which I have spelled out often are met. These are mutuality of interest, specificity of purpose and the definition of the resources to be applied. In the case of the NCD Alliance, there is no doubt about the mutuality of interest of its partners. One challenge will be to define very clearly post HLM what constitutes the purpose to which it will dedicate the resources to be mobilized from the partners and from others. In the case of the UN organizations, it will call for astute leadership at the highest level and considerable energy to establish the mutuality of interest and specificity of purpose and it will be even more difficult to clarify the resources to be applied in this case to the prevention and control of NCDs. But the difficulty of the task does not in any way diminish its importance.

Another stress derives from inherent reluctance to change. I knew a professor who said the most powerful antigen known to man was a new idea. The perception of a loss of autonomy or identity in becoming involved in a partnership is a major difficulty. The solution to this lies principally in the leadership of the partnering institutions and its capacity to convince the constituents of the mutuality of interest which in some cases may not be immediately obvious, given the past history and what may be conceived as successes to date. The "I am all right Jack"

phenomenon in institutions that have hewed their own path for years with success is a reality and is not to be discounted. One of the current difficulties is the competition in terms of funding as especially in this climate it is often the same sources that are being tapped for funding.

But in spite of all these possible stresses, I wish us to establish the partnerships and unity that are critical for sustained action to prevent and control NCDs.

I wish us to unite so that we can fight the Cassandras and naysayers who do not believe that we can prevent early death from NCDs.

I wish us to unite so that we can ignite a flame of commitment and action for the programs to prevent and control NCDs.

I wish us to unite so that we can excite the interest of the passive and the pessimistic and- to quote Shakespeare- take arms against the sea of NCD troubles and contribute to a healthy future for our children and their children.

I thank you.