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## Dear World Health Organization: It's Time for a Change

I was eight years old the first time I went to Pakistan. My grandfather had just had a heart attack and we rushed to the hospital straight from the airport. I remember feeling anxious and scared as I walked through the emergency room.

The reception was lined with people who were on the verge of losing their lives to largely preventable illnesses—and families that were desperately trying to bypass long wait times and gather funds to save the lives of their loved ones.

I returned to Pakistan almost 15 years later to work on a maternal health project at the Aga Khan University. The year was 2013 and Dr. Sania Nishtar was serving as the Federal Minister for Science and Technology, Education and Trainings and Information Technology and Telecom under the caretaker government. Not only was she the only woman in the cabinet, the public health sector was abuzz with talk of how she was going to reestablish a Federal Ministry of Health. A task that seemed almost impossible with such a short window.

For many that live in the developed world this might seem like a small feat—but in Pakistan it was revolutionary. Tackling health challenges and working across government departments in Pakistan is no easy task—especially as a woman. It requires the strongest of leaders with the utmost patience and astute negotiating skills.

What should have taken years, took Sania less than 100 days. During her term, she also convinced the Prime Minister to reinstate the Polio Cell, which ensured ongoing political commitment from the highest level of government for polio eradication. She set into motion actions that would help improve the health system of Pakistan for decades to come.

Sania has made a career of accomplishing the impossible and of doing the unexpected. When she left her position in the Ministry she left for her successor the “Handover Papers.” These papers breakdown all of the key decision points she made while in office so that her successor was able to build on the work she started. This level of transparency was unprecedented in Pakistan.

As a young Pakistani woman working in public health, I was blown away by Sania. She fought for the most marginalized people in the country in the most effective, dignified way.

I've been following the World Health Organization's (WHO) Director-General campaign and rooting her from the sidelines. This campaign exemplifies how she'll lead the WHO and ensure that it is fit to deal with today's challenges—from unpredictable outbreaks like Ebola and Zika, to the growing burden of non-communicable diseases, to the increasing threat of antimicrobial resistance.

As a health innovator and builder that has worked in some of the most resource constrained settings and improved the lives of many, Sania has shown an ability to make real change at the local, national and international levels. She has both deep multilateral and grassroots experience. She will bring disparate groups together, build consensus and drive action. Most importantly, she will bring transparency and accountability to an organization that desperately needs it.

So I urge world leaders as they prepare to head to Geneva for the World Health Assembly to check their biases and vote for the person they truly think will improve the lives of billions around the world. The current scale of global health challenges should not be underestimated. The time for politics is gone—our priority should be good governance. The next Director General must be a leader who can restore and improve the WHO we will all need to protect our health.

We are still losing far too many lives to preventable and treatable illnesses. I hope that one day no child will have to see what I saw

many years ago in Karachi's hospital—no matter which part of the world they live in. I hope that one day no one will lose a loved one before their time because of inadequate access to services or lack of funds. And, I am confident Sania will help us get there.