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May 10, 2017

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Pakistani civil society steps up support for Dr. Sania Nishtar's WHO bid



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Recognising the need for urgent reform of the World Health Organisation (WHO), a coalition of more than 120 civil society organisations spearheaded by LEAD Pakistan has rallied around Dr. Sania Nishtar's candidacy to be the next Director General of WHO.

United behind Dr. Sania Nishtar's vision for a new WHO, the organizations and have strongly recommended her to all WHO member states, requesting their support in the upcoming World Health Assembly.

“At present, the world is struggling to respond effectively to the challenges of new disease outbreaks, antimicrobial resistance, childhood obesity, widening inequalities in health and other global health catastrophes,” said Dr. Sania Nishtar, candidate for the Director General of WHO. She added, “I am honoured that the civil society in Pakistan are standing behind my candidacy to ensure that their voices, as well as global voices and calls for reform are heard in the new World Health Organisation I expect to lead,” she added.

The civil society declaration states that while in government, Dr. Nishtar reestablished the Federal Ministry of Health in less than 100 days, which dramatically changed how the government of Pakistan responds to tackling disease. As co-chair of the WHO Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity, Dr. Nishtar brought all stakeholders together and negotiated a new path forward.

“As well as founding and scaling up her own NGO, Dr. Nishtar has championed civil society while driving reform in the government of Pakistan, and as part of her extensive work with international agencies. She is the only candidate with civil society experience and a track record of being able to bring multi-stakeholder groups together to build joint strategies and plans of action,” the declaration states.

“Dr. Nishtar is the one candidate in the race to say that the status quo isn't working and reform is needed,” said Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, CEO of LEAD Pakistan. “In Pakistan, Dr. Nishtar has a strong reputation for transparency, integrity and is a leader that actually delivers on her promises.”

“We are grateful for the work Dr. Nishtar has done in Pakistan and we urge all Member States to get behind her reform agenda and elect her to be the next Director-General of the WHO,” said Shahnaz Wazir Ali, a development practitioner who serves on several boards such as LEAD and SPDC.

“Dr. Nishtar is an institution in her own right. She can promote the global mandate of WHO in line with the ground realities of different regions. Her work through Heartfile has tremendously impacted the health of vulnerable groups in Pakistan,” said Khalida for SACH, Struggle for Change.

Dr. Nishtar has shown her commitment to major health challenges that face the world today. Her leadership on the frontlines of the health crises in Pakistan, firstly as a doctor and subsequently in civil society, government and within international agencies means that she is the only candidate who has the breadth and depth of experience and ambition to tackle global health crises head on.