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Thank you, Dr Nishtar

My own interactions with Dr Nishtar have always been intellectually rich and stimulating

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It isn't every day that we take pride in our citizens at the international stage. Certainly those who aspire for higher offices often bring embarrassment through their actions, back-room deals, cronyism, harassment and outright corruption. The problem is widespread and not just in political offices. Academia suffers equally from our moral corruption, and even at our elite universities there have been a spate of recent incidents with those seeking top positions failing to live up to the minimal standards. Yet, every now and then, someone comes along who restores the faith in our people and our future.

Dr Sania Nishtar's bid to be the director general of the World Health Organisation ultimately did not succeed. She came woefully close, but lost out in the vote at the WHO last week. But her campaign and the values it espoused won countless hearts. Observers of the WHO elections, ranging from journalists to public health professionals, politicians and practitioners, from across the world, many of whom were supporting other candidates, were equally impressed by what she represented and what she stood up for. Her own story is a powerful one, and worth listening to. But it is more than her story that was inspiring. It was a message of building trust, creating a culture of openness and transparency and focusing on important health issues of our time.

My own interactions with Dr Nishtar have always been intellectually rich and stimulating. Last time I met her, about a year ago, she gave me a thick document. The hundred and fifty odd pages were the handover document to her successor as the minister of health. These handover papers were not just a formality, but a rigorous analysis of what ails the Pakistani health system. It was detailed and focused, not just in identifying the problems but also in choosing the right solutions. It is a worthy read for anyone who cares to help our fragile health system. Her book, *Choked Pipes*, is one of the most comprehensive and clearly written texts on Pakistan's health system. This book has been a major resource for my own work in understanding the challenges of substandard and counterfeit drugs in Pakistan.

The decision to choose the next DG of WHO, ultimately was through a vote by the ministers of health of the member states, and Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus from Ethiopia came out on top. I have high hopes from Dr Tedros and from what I have heard and read, I believe that he will be a strong champion for important and urgent global health issues. But we Pakistanis have plenty to be proud of, in not only how Dr Nishtar conducted her campaign, but also knowing that we are able to produce people like her. She is a shining example of the recent, and most exciting development, where girls and women, have continued to bring international recognition, accolades and global respect.

Her bid was ultimately unsuccessful, but it presents the national and the provincial governments with a unique opportunity. We have, amongst us, someone who is a thought leader and a sophisticated analyst of our health system. Dr Nishtar has seen first hand what works in other countries and how it may bridge our gaps in equity, access and quality care. She has an international reputation that is shared by only a few other public health scholars from Pakistan. Yet, I am concerned that her insistence on a corruption free system and her dedication towards transparency might be too much for many in the power corridors to handle.

I hope I am wrong in having these fears.

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