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Date  
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Ref. No.

To International Agency for Blindness Prevention  
Durban, South Africa

**Subject: Commitment to promote Universal Eye Health and eliminate  
Blinding NTDs**

Globally 285 million people are visually impaired of whom 39 million people are blind. 80 % of all visual impairment can be prevented or cured. About 90 % of the world's visually impaired people live in low-income settings. Sub-Sahara Africa carries 15 % of the global burden of blindness, with 5,9 million people being blind. The burden on blinding Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) is largely concentrated in sub-Sahara Africa: 99 % of people infected with Onchocerciasis live mostly in rural areas of 31 African countries. More than two thirds of people in trachoma-endemic districts live in sub-Sahara Africa. Effectively addressing blinding Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) has a positive impact on other diseases of poverty by improving environmental hygiene and sanitation, access to clean water and vector control as well as by co-management of preventive chemotherapy.

At the World Health Assembly in 2013 a Global Action Plan on Universal Eye Health 2014-2019 was adopted, with the global target to reduce avoidable blindness by 25 % by 2019.

To achieve this target, we, the undersigned, have committed to

- Avail leadership ,governance and developed a national policy & plan for eye health with implementing and integrated in the general health system
- Develop and maintain a sustainable workforce for the provision of comprehensive eye care services as part of the broader human resources for health workforce
- Provide comprehensive and equitable eye care services at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, incorporating elimination of NTDs where possible
- Integrate rehabilitation of people with visual impairment and chronic conditions including those caused by blinding NTDs into the national health system and other relevant sector policies
- Develop specific national targets and indicators within national strategies to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), to achieve the SDG targets 3.3. on NTDs, 3.8. on Universal Health Coverage, and 3.c. on Health Workforce
- Tackle inequity in access to services, with a special focus on poor and excluded communities to leave no one behind
- Reduce catastrophic out-of-pocket health expenses by providing domestic financial resources and include treatments in accessible health insurance systems



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STATE MINISTER



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At the same time we call on

- The International Community, bi- and multilateral donors, to continue supporting our initiatives in providing predictable and programmable financial support within our health sector budgets and via our development partners to promote Universal Eye Health and eliminate blinding NTDs
- The WHO, Professional Organizations and Development Partners to sustain provision of technical assistance, guidelines and policy approaches based on good practice and learning
- All actors involved to form coalitions and partnerships at national and international level to enhance effective collaboration and programme implementation

In recent years significant steps were made in improving access to eye health services and tackling blinding Neglected Tropical Diseases. Progress and success can be observed across endemic countries – thanks to policy commitments and additional funding made available. We must build on this to scale up these initiatives, as envisaged in the Sustainable Development Goals.

CC:

- State Minister's Office (Programs)
- Disease prevention and control Directorate  
FMOH



Kind regards,

KEBEDE WORKU (MD)  
STATE MINISTER