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Lessons Learnt from the 2008 G8: Transition from Japan to Italy

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Excellencies, friends, and ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to thank you all for gathering at this Global Health Forum in Rome, a great city with its most remarkable history.

The world is facing one of the deepest recessions in our history while globalization, whether you like it or not, continues to move forward with ever-widening connectedness. We could summarize the state of the world in three words, 'HOT, FLAT AND CROWDED' as Thomas Friedman put it in his recent book.

These are the results of OUR PROGRESS over many centuries. We live longer, healthier, and consume per capita, ever more energy, food, water, and other resources.

The world population rose from 500 million 500 years ago, to 1.6 billion 100 years ago, rose to 6.6 billion now, and will rise to 9 billion by year 2050. Life expectancy rose from 40 to 80 years in the last 100 years for many those who live in affluent societies, but many others have been left far behind.

We live longer, complaining of obesity, diabetes; wasting and dumping tons of food each day. Meanwhile, 10s of millions of children, men and women in many parts of the world, die each year simply of starvation, poor nutrition, and lack of decent drinking water.

The connectedness by internet, mobile phone and other ICT, brought us to realize that, indeed, we live in 'One Connected World.' Thus we cannot remain unaffected from what happens in remote places that are left behind, many places in Africa, South Asia, and many other regions of the world.

We are quite behind the schedule of our collective promise of MDGs, as reconfirmed at the UN gathering of last year.

Poverty and health inequity impact more severely those affected, depriving their potentials for development, thus widening the disparity within this and next generations. This is a human right and moral issue as clearly pointed out in the recent WHO report by its Commission on Social Determinants of Health in which I had a privilege to serve as a Commissioner.

The inequity leads to frustration, violence and instability leading to national, regional and often major world conflicts such as we face in Zimbabwe, Middle East, Afghanistan, Gaza, just to name a few. Human sufferings and tragedies continue, while we live in 'One Connected World.'

The G8 Summit has played a key role in alleviating the global instability addressing their causes and often delivering effective and responsible policies with financial resources.

The Lancet article shared with you today, "Italian G8 summit: a critical juncture for global health", is published as of today, illustrates our challenge at La Maddalena G8 Summit this summer.

Since its first appearance as a major focus for the G8 Summit of year 2000 in Okinawa, Japan, global health has had a continuous presence on the G8 agenda. G8 has expanded its promises on global health allocating more than doubled from 7 billion US dollars in 2000 to 17 billion dollars in 2006, which was backed by ROBUST global economic growth.

But this situation is all about to change due to financial crisis and global economic downturn.

The experience of last year, with Japan as the G8 chair, provides some valuable lessons. Last year, the world was already heading into economic slow-down, and there were other pressing agenda items ready to crowd out global health, such as financial crisis, food shortage, energy demand, climate-change. And yet, global health managed to stay on the G8 agenda. Why and How?

There are three lessons.

First, obvious but crucial, is the national political leadership of the G8 Chair. The Prime Minister Fukuda and Foreign Minister spoke from almost a year before the summit about setting global health on the agenda, recognizing this is not only as health issue per se, but as a matter of human security. Moreover, media carried special programs on global health, that resonated with the public. Early, personal and broad public engagement is critical.

Second, a multi-stakeholder approach is indispensable, particularly in a 'flattening connected world'. Government alone has neither the resources nor skills to undertake global initiatives.

Leaders from government, business, academia, NGOs, and media were brought together in various forums. The Global Health Summit co-organized by us, 'Health Policy Institute Japan' and the World Bank, in collaboration with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, brought key stakeholders together in Tokyo. Further, a multi-stakeholder working group led by Prof. Takemi, who is here today with us, prepared policy recommendations on health-system strengthening, laid the basis for the "participatory approach", as described in the Chair's summary of the Toyako G8 Summit.

Third, international outreach by each stakeholder consolidated the initiatives. For example, G8 Summit NGO Forum consisting of more than 140 NGOs, coordinated their activities with NGOs around the world.

Science community also gathered its force. The Science Council of Japan coordinated with G8+5 national academies delivered the G8+5 statement on global health, to all G8 Heads of State.

This year, in this economic environment, we know well that it is naive to simply expect global health to remain on the G8 agenda.

Health agenda needs to be earned each year and, over time, strategically sets into effective and

cohesive policies by: 1) building national political support in the G8 chair country; 2) mobilizing all stakeholders across the national boundaries; and 3) reaching out across stakeholders, globally.

We need to create such multi-stakeholder platforms, which fulfill those three functions, across all G8+5 and other key countries of the world.

Following on our experience in Japan last year, our Institute has prepared, and has distributed today, three papers that summarize our learning from Japan, with implications for Italy and all of us.

We have also worked closely with our partners over the last year to help develop a multi-stakeholder platform in Italy. With the Rockefeller Foundation, we organized a preparatory meeting of Italian stakeholders in Bellagio and Rome last November.

Today, together with our gracious co-organizer, Aspen Institute Italia, we are delighted to have a convening here today, of Italian leaders from across sectors, and the international global health community leaders.

It is important to note, that there will be a convening of G7 Finance Ministers tomorrow. Next Monday and Tuesday, G8 government's health experts plus H8 meeting will convene to help shape the G8 global health agenda.

Thus, this is all a part of a continuous process, hoping this meeting being a pivotal anchor, toward the La Maddalena Summit later this year

Japan and Italy share a track record of effective G8 transition on health agenda. Eight years ago, the idea of the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria was initiated at the 2000 Kyushu Okinawa Summit by Japan, and materialized at the 2001 Genoa Summit hosted by Italy led by the Prime Minister Berlusconi. The story of Global Fund has become our continuing legacy.

This tradition of distinctiveness and close collaboration should continue.

We, Japan and Italy, should carry the tradition onto Canada, the next G8 Chair, and beyond, to demonstrate to the world, our collective effort and commitment to engage in the GLOBAL AGENDA THAT MATTER to us all.

It is our hope that this tradition of reaching out across countries, across stakeholders, will continue, and that participants of this forum, as well as the global health and policy leaders around the world who could not be here today, will help build a ROBUST PLATFORM that will promote the health of people all around the world, thus to make our world a better place.

Thank you.

THE END OF SPEECH