

## **Essential Medicines Statement, by Sahar Afzal, Dutch United Nations Youth Representative, July 2016**

Various barriers have contributed to difficulties in combatting the continued burden of infectious diseases and increasing prevalence of chronic non-communicable diseases in Africa. This includes infrastructural, socio-cultural, environmental, political, economic, and other intertwined factors affecting the likelihood an individual can access quality and affordable health. Inequities in accessing health commodities are far too common, often due to poor infrastructure, lack of medical personnel, and in some cases poor health education. In fact, a WHO study has shown that 100,000 deaths a year in Africa are linked to the counterfeit drug trade, with numbers even higher when considering expired and substandard drugs. 16.6% of drugs in Africa fail basic quality control tests, lower than the 9% global rate. This is unacceptable and should be properly addressed to build the resilience of local health systems.

This is an especially important issue for young people. For example, HIV infection disproportionately affects young women. More than 4 in 10 new HIV new infections are in young women aged 15-24 years old. Regarding NCDs, 70% of premature deaths in adults result from behaviours begun in adolescence. Therefore, the importance of access to affordable, high-quality medicines is crucial to ensure physical, emotional, and social well-being.

In this regard, there are several recommendations I would like to share on this topic:

- Governments, manufacturers and other stakeholders must work towards developing more robust licensing, regulation, and screening of drugs.
- There must be improved regulatory and facilitative frameworks that should reprimand malpractice and reward initiatives such as good manufacturing practices, storage conditions, labelling, and guidelines for proper use.
- New investments in this sector should have minimum requirements on the standard of existing companies, and a reserved percentage of new investments should be reserved for enhancing GMPs and facilities for ensuring high quality drugs.
- One other important point which is not addressed is prevention. We should tackle the problem at the start or actually prevent the problem. Public information should be done to make our children and youngsters aware of diseases such as HIV and TB, as well as the rising global burden of NCDs.