19 May 2014 | Geneva – The **World Health Assembly, the world's health policy-making body**, opened its 67th Session this morning with the election of **Dr Roberto Tomas Morales Ojeda**, Cuba's Minister of Public Health, as its new president. Five vice-presidents were also appointed from Bahrain, Congo, Fiji, Lithuania, and Sri Lanka, representing their respective regions.

In her opening address to the Health Assembly, WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan voiced her deep concern about the increase worldwide of childhood obesity, with numbers climbing fastest in developing countries. "As the 2014 World Health Statistics report bluntly states, 'Our children are getting fatter,'" she said.

To gather the best possible advice on dealing with this crisis, Dr Chan announced that she has established a high-level Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity. The Commission - co-chaired by Sir Peter Gluckman, Chief Science Advisor to New Zealand's Prime Minister, and Dr Sania Nishtar, founder of Pakistan's health policy think tank, Heartfile – will produce a consensus report specifying which approaches are likely to be most effective in different contexts around the world. The recommendations of the report will be announced at next year's Health Assembly.

Dr Chan challenged the Health Assembly to consider the potential impact on health worldwide of the changing poverty map – with 70% of the world's poor living in middle-income countries with emerging economies. "Will economic growth be accompanied by a proportionate increase in domestic budgets for health? Will countries put polices in place to ensure that benefits are fairly shared?" she asked. "If not, the world will see a growing number of rich countries full of poor people."

She also alerted delegates to the importance of addressing climate change: "In March, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued its most dismal report to date, with a strong focus on the consequences for health." Many delegates focused on the links between climate and health in the Health Assembly's opening plenary debate, particularly the impact of climate on important social and environmental determinants of health – clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food and secure shelter.

New global strategy and targets for tuberculosis

The first meeting of Committee A then opened with a discussion on communicable diseases.

Member States approved a resolution endorsing a new global strategy and targets for tuberculosis (TB) prevention, care and control after 2015. The strategy aims to end the global TB epidemic, with targets to reduce TB deaths by 95% and to cut new cases by 90% by 2035. It sets interim milestones for 2020, 2025, and 2030. The resolution calls on governments to

adapt and implement the strategy with high-level commitment and financing. It reinforces a focus within the strategy on serving populations highly vulnerable to infection and poor health care access, such as migrants. The strategy and resolution highlight the need to engage partners within the health sector and beyond, such as in the fields of social protection, labour, immigration and justice. The resolution requests the WHO Secretariat to help Member States adapt and operationalize the strategy, noting the importance of tackling the problem of multidrug-resistant TB and promoting collaboration across international borders. WHO is also asked to monitor implementation and evaluate progress towards the milestones and the 2035 targets.

The estimated number of people falling ill with tuberculosis each year is slowly declining and the world is on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goal to reverse the spread of TB by 2015. However, TB remains one of the world's deadliest communicable diseases, present in all regions of the world. In 2012, 8.6 million people fell ill with TB and 1.3 million died from TB. Some 450 000 people developed multidrug- resistant TB in 2012.

Technical briefing on International Health Regulations

At today's technical briefing, representatives from the Secretariat, Member States and international partner organizations highlighted some of the achievements, remaining challenges, new initiatives and commitments to ensure that the world is able to prevent, detect and respond to all health security risks that may spread internationally.