20 SEPTEMBER 2016 (New York) – The Presidents of France and South Africa today called for urgent investments globally to create new jobs in the health sector in order to prevent a projected shortfall of 18 million health workers primarily in low- and lower-middle-income countries, and help countries to maximize the social and economic benefits of increased health employment.

The High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth, chaired by H.E. François Hollande and H.E. Jacob Zuma, today delivered its final report and recommendations to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York.

The Commission concluded that investing in the health workforce is needed to make progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, including gains in health, global security and inclusive economic growth. The commission made 10 recommendations for realising those gains, through appropriate investments in health employment that can power economies, move countries closer to universal health coverage and act as a bulwark against outbreaks such as Ebola.

Ageing populations and increasing rates of non-communicable diseases are projected to generate demand for 40 million new health workers worldwide by 2030, which would represent a doubling of the current global health workforce. But most of those jobs will be created in the wealthiest countries. Without action there will be a shortfall, primarily in low- and lower-middle-income countries, of 18 million health workers needed to achieve and sustain universal health coverage.

Mounting evidence shows that investments in the health sector pay handsome dividends. The returns on investment in health are estimated to be 9 to 1, and around one quarter of growth between 2000 and 2011 in low-income and middle-income countries is estimated to have resulted from improvements to health. Investing in skills and expanding health employment will also contribute to the economic empowerment of women and youth.

“For too long countries have seen health workers as just another cost to be managed, instead

of an investment with a triple return for health, economic growth and global health security," said Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization.

The need for action is urgent. The Commission calls for immediate actions by March 2018 to secure commitments and accountability for accelerated health workforce investments. In response to the Commission's request, the Vice-Chairs of the Commission from WHO, ILO and OECD will convene all relevant stakeholders by the end of 2016 to develop a five-year implementation plan for the 10 recommendations.

"The report provides solid evidence that investing in the health economy and progressing towards universal health coverage can strengthen economic growth and make it more inclusive by generating decent jobs in a wide range of occupations," said Mr Guy Ryder, Director-General of the International Labour Organization. "It offers practical proposals for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 3 on healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages, and goal 8 on inclusive growth and decent work."

Health is a major and growing source of jobs. Across the OECD, employment in health and social work grew by 48 per cent between 2000 and 2014, while jobs in industry and agriculture declined.

"These recommendations will chart the course to achieve greater and more effective investment in the health workforce. This will be a critical element to promote better lives and help our economies flourish and achieve their full potential," said Mr Angel Gurría, Secretary-General of the OECD.

The Commission's vision is for an expanded, transformed and sustainable health workforce to promote health, prevent disease, meet the needs of populations, and drive inclusive economic growth.

The commission's 10 recommendations are:

1. Stimulate investments in creating decent health sector jobs, particularly for women and

youth, with the right skills, in the right numbers and in the right places.

2. Maximize women's economic participation and foster their empowerment through institutionalizing their leadership, addressing gender biases and inequities in education and the health labour market, and tackling gender concerns in health reform processes.

3. Scale up transformative, high-quality education and lifelong learning so that all health workers have skills that match the health needs of populations and can work to their full potential.

4. Reform service models concentrated on hospital care and focus instead on prevention and on the efficient provision of high-quality, affordable, integrated, community-based, people-centred primary and ambulatory care, paying special attention to underserved areas.

5. Harness the power of cost-effective information and communication technologies to enhance health education, people-centred health services and health information systems.

6. Ensure investment in the International Health Regulations core capacities, including skills development of national and international health workers in humanitarian settings and public health emergencies, both acute and protracted. Ensure the protection and security of all health workers and health facilities in all settings.

7. Raise adequate funding from domestic and international sources, public and private where appropriate, and consider broad-based health financing reform where needed, to invest in the right skills, decent working conditions and an appropriate number of health workers.

8. Promote intersectoral collaboration at national, regional and international levels; engage civil society, unions and other health workers' organizations and the private sector; and align international cooperation to support investments in the health workforce, as part of national health and education strategies and plans.

9. Advance international recognition of health workers' qualifications to optimize skills use, increase the benefits from and reduce the negative effects of health worker migration, and safeguard migrants' rights.

10. Undertake robust research and analysis of health labour markets, using harmonized metrics and methodologies, to strengthen evidence, accountability and action.