15 May 2014 / **GENEVA** – People everywhere are living longer, according to the **World Health Statistics 2014** published today by the World Health Organization (WHO). Based on global averages, a girl who was born in 2012 can expect to live to around 73 years, and a boy to the age of 68. This is six years longer than the average global life expectancy for a child born in 1990.

WHO's annual statistics report shows that low-income countries have made the greatest progress, with an average increase in life expectancy by 9 years from 1990 to 2012. The top six countries where life expectancy increased the most were Liberia which saw a 20-year increase (from 42 years in 1990 to 62 years in 2012) followed by Ethiopia (from 45 to 64 years), Maldives (58 to 77 years), Cambodia (54 to 72 years), Timor-Leste (50 to 66 years) and Rwanda (48 to 65 years).

"An important reason why global life expectancy has improved so much is that fewer children are dying before their fifth birthday," says Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General. "But there is still a major rich-poor divide: people in high-income countries continue to have a much better chance of living longer than people in low-income countries."

Gaps between rich and poor countries

A boy born in 2012 in a high-income country can expect to live to the age of around 76 – 16 years longer than a boy born in a low-income country (age 60). For girls, the difference is even wider; a gap of 19 years separates life expectancy in high-income (82 years) and low-income countries (63 years).

Wherever they live in the world, women live longer than men. The gap between male and female life expectancy is greater in high-income countries where women live around six years longer than men. In low-income countries, the difference is around three years.

Women in Japan have the longest life expectancy in the world at 87 years, followed by Spain, Switzerland and Singapore. Female life expectancy in all the top 10 countries was 84 years or longer. Life expectancy among men is 80 years or more in nine countries, with the longest male life expectancy in Iceland, Switzerland and Australia.

"In high-income countries, much of the gain in life expectancy is due to success in tackling noncommunicable diseases," says Dr Ties Boerma, Director of the Department of Health Statistics and Information Systems at WHO. "Fewer men and women are dying before they get to their 60th birthday from heart disease and stroke. Richer countries have become better at monitoring and managing high blood pressure for example."

Declining tobacco use is also a key factor in helping people live longer in several countries.

At the other end of the scale, life expectancy for both men and women is still less than 55 years in nine sub-Saharan African countries – Angola, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Mozambique, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Life expectancy at birth among men and women in 2012 in the 10 top-ranked countries*

Men			**Women**
Rank	Country	Life expectancy	Rank
1	Iceland	81.2	1
2	Switzerland	80.7	2
3	Australia	80.5	3
4	Israel	80.2	4
5	Singapore	80.2	5
6	New Zealand	80.2	6
7	Italy	80.2	7
8	Japan	80.0	8

9	Sweden	80.0	9
10	Luxembourg	79.7	10

*Countries with a population below 250 000 are omitted due to uncertainty in life-expectancy estimates.

Some other key facts from *World Health Statistics 2014*

- The top three causes of years of life lost due to premature death are coronary heart disease, lower respiratory infections (such as pneumonia) and stroke.

- Worldwide, a major shift is occurring in the causes and ages of death. In 22 countries (all in Africa), 70% or more of years of life lost (due to premature deaths) are still caused by infectious diseases and related conditions. Meanwhile, in 47 countries (mostly high-income), noncommunicable diseases and injuries cause more than 90% of years of life lost. More than 100 countries are transitioning rapidly towards a greater proportion of deaths from noncommunicable diseases and injuries.

- Around 44 million (6.7%) of the world's children aged less than five years were overweight or obese in 2012. Ten million of these children were in the WHO African Region where levels of child obesity have increased rapidly.

- Most deaths among under-fives occur among children born prematurely (17.3%); pneumonia is responsible for the second highest number of deaths (15.2%).

- Between 1995 and 2012, 56 million people were successfully treated for tuberculosis and 22 million lives were saved. In 2012, an estimated 450 000 people worldwide developed multi-drug resistant tuberculosis.

- Only one-third of all deaths worldwide are recorded in civil registries along with cause-of-death information.

About WHO statistics

Published every year since 2005 by WHO, *World Health Statistics* is the definitive source of information on the health of the world's people. It contains data from 194 countries on a range of mortality, disease and health system indicators including life expectancy, illnesses and deaths from key diseases, health services and treatments, financial investment in health, as well as risk factors and behaviours that affect health.