

Valedictory speech
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President World Medical Association

Thank you, Chair Dr. Montgomery, Secretary General Dr. Kloiber, officers, Council and Assembly members, Junior Doctors, and Associate members.

Dear colleagues, dear guests, and observers, dear friends!

Thank you for gathering, for being part of, and contributing to the medical community. We are thankful that we can finally meet in person for the World Medical Association's General Assembly. The value of meeting in person cannot be measured; as Warren Buffet says, *"You will never see eye-to-eye if you never meet face-to-face."*

My presidential year has had many obstacles to meeting in person. Many of you are dear friends, and I have seen the joy on your faces when greeting each other after so long apart. It warms my heart.

Our work is highly dependent on actually getting together to trade ideas and exchange views. Solutions to complex problems occur by working as a team, slowly taking one step after another... together. Our work is challenging and thought-provoking; as the Chinese Curse goes.....we live in "interesting times." Difficulties remain due to echoes of the pandemic, diseases, and humanitarian catastrophes. The WMA has a duty to work together, stand for humanity, and advocate for the highest ethical standards.

During my year as president, we have advocated for equitable distribution of COVID vaccines and pushed for sufficient capacity in other vaccine programs. Still, the world has not caught up. Coupled with the influence of anti-vaccination campaigns, pandemic issues led to a measles outbreak in Zimbabwe, leaving more than 700 children dead.

Supply chain issues and conflict have made caring for the world population an incredibly complex proposition. War crimes that seemingly occur daily, are cruel and unacceptable. We have numerous reports of systematic violence against women and children. The WMA condemns the ongoing attacks on the Ukrainian people, healthcare workers, and facilities. WHO tracks confrontations and counts some 800 attacks on healthcare globally this year. This is unacceptable, and as president of the WMA, in my Valedictory speech, I urge you that WMA is needed now more than ever.

Refugees pour across borders, humans fleeing for their lives, creating incredible healthcare challenges. I had hoped to spend time building more robust, global governing institutions during my presidency. The world needs more collaboration, and WMA has a critical role in this process. Sadly, we have had to focus on war, threats of nuclear weapons, and attacks on healthcare workers and facilities. Healthcare is a vital part of society, and healthcare workers should be considered “neutral” in any conflict; instead, we have become targets. The attacks on healthcare facilities have reached never-before-seen levels. The crimes against civilians and those who care for others are horrible; it is a global disgrace.

We are forced to focus on a world threatened by nuclear weapons and a despot with an appetite for neighboring countries. Russia continues to place the planet in peril - through either arrogance or ignorance – by failing to safeguard Ukraine’s nuclear power plants ...not to mention the thinly-veiled threat of unleashing nuclear weapons. The Russian-controlled nuclear plant in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, was disconnected from the power grid for the first time in its history. Many of you vividly recall Chernobyl. In the blink of an eye, this regional crisis could become a global health disaster. Every physician should take notice and condemn this irresponsible, reckless behavior.

Immense human suffering continues, and the WMA opposes flagrant violations of fundamental human rights. We demand allegations of war crimes be investigated and those responsible brought to justice.

As physicians, working integrated in society, meeting people in all stages and situations, we have deep insights in struggles of humanity. Violence and injustice is not isolated to war. Violence against women is still widespread. Most violence

against women is within the family, often perpetrated by a partner. I am proud to stand for those without voice and foster equity and equality in the name of WMA.

Like you, I have been living in a 'virtual' world. Despite this challenge, you have graciously invited me to meet. To all I have met this year, thank you for sharing your knowledge and wisdom. I have been constantly impressed by your persistence and sustained enthusiasm. Thank you for funding the Ukrainian effort to provide critical medical equipment.

Pandemic echoes rumble through society in general and the medical community in particular. More than 600 million cases worldwide, over 6.5 million deaths, and WHO estimates between 80,000 – 180,000 healthcare professionals have succumbed to COVID. Every death is tragic, but the downstream effect on society because of healthcare lives lost is compounded. Adding to these losses are thousands leaving our ranks early. Many, if not most, have left due to – fear, burnout, and the (often overlooked) feeling of helplessness - worried that they can no longer make a difference. We must continue to invest in vaccines, but other measures to aid our colleagues must occur. This pandemic will not be our last, and those who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it. WMA demands that governments and other stakeholders recognize the personal risk healthcare professionals incur and make every effort to protect them.

Our mental health professionals tell me the pandemic directly correlates to the mental health epidemic. While crisis levels of patients seek aid, few find help. Our psychiatric colleagues have been devastated by many leaving the profession or cutting back. Those that remain are overwhelmed by the unbelievable need. Our colleagues say, as incredible as the current mental health numbers are, there is woeful underreporting.

This does not begin to address the issues within our professional ranks. The responses collected from the 1,119 healthcare workers surveyed in the US indicated that they are: **Stressed out and stretched too thin**: 93% of healthcare workers were experiencing stress, 86% reported experiencing anxiety, 77% reported frustration, 76% reported exhaustion and burnout, and 75% said they were overwhelmed.

I have fostered engagement in 'One Health' – a WHO initiative promoting human health, animal health, and a sustainable environment. None of these exists independent of the others, and an integrated and unified balance is needed. Covid-19 is not over; it will not be the last pandemic, and far from the last challenge we face. Healthcare needs to transform in order to give access to all. Signs are everywhere that we are at critical capacity to provide healthcare for our entire civilization. Sometimes crisis is the crucible needed to make substantial change. Let us lead this change!

While I am very proud of our work modernizing the International Code of Medical Ethics, I am deeply concerned about the growing violence against physicians this year. A recent study shows that violence against physicians often involves patients or relatives. Unfortunately, for our Indian colleagues, this is nothing new; their ongoing study reveals that more than 75% of Indian doctors have experienced workplace violence. The Indian parliament passed historic legislation to protect healthcare workers and institutions. Thank you to the Indian Medical Association for leading the way.

I wish to thank Sunny Park, Clarisse Delorme, Magda Mihaila, Nigel Duncan, and the other WMA staff for their support despite the effort required, secondary to the pandemic and geopolitical conflicts. I thank my fellow executive committee members for our close collaboration in these challenging times – Drs. Montgomery, Kloiber, Barbe, Enabulele, Matsubara, Wankhedkar, Hermansen, Park, and Rault. Special thanks to Tomas Hedmark, a remarkably efficient and professional colleague, and a reliable co-worker. Thanks to the Swedish Medical Association and our strong and talented president Sofia Rydgren Stahle. Thanks to Torsten Mossberg, chair of the ethics committee – you have been an invaluable colleague with your humbleness and sharp mind – not to mention your ability to sing!

Most importantly, I thank my family, especially my beautiful girls, Nora and Fröja, who cannot be here today because of school. They have been patient and waited during long meetings and longer working hours. They have a whole gallery of pictures of me working at my computer every holiday and weekend for many years. They need me to come home now.

Finally, you have my humble gratitude for entrusting me with this office. It is a challenging and unique position, and every day, I have strived to surpass expectations of those who have given me this opportunity of a lifetime. My presidency was deeply affected by the pandemic and the war, but we adapted.

We in leadership are volunteers and temporary volunteers at that. It's vital to an organization's future to recognize this and realize that for the organization to grow and improve, the old must give way to the new. We need to constantly invigorate The World Medical Association in order to make it relevant to every member, every day. I am fortunate to be succeeded by Dr. Osahon Enabulele - a colleague that I value highly. I am confident he will honor the office, and I wish him great success.

It has been a fantastic journey. Now that my role as president comes to an end, I want to thank you for being my colleagues and friends – and that will never end.