

**71 st SESSION OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

New York, September 20, 2016

Mr. President:

Distinguished Heads of State and Government;

National representatives and representatives of international organizations;

Ladies and Gentlemen

As a citizen and President of Uruguay, it is a great honor for me to occupy once again this seat and address the General Assembly.

I come to this forum, the biggest and most representative of the world today and bring the greetings from the people and Government of Uruguay.

A greeting that expresses our passion for peace, freedom, democracy, justice and solidarity that identify our nation as well as the United Nations Organization of which Uruguay was one of the founding members in 1945, at present being a non-permanent member of UN Security Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As this is not my first time here, I run the risk of repeating some of the concepts mentioned in previous occasions, and more precisely what I expressed last year on September 29 during the 70<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly

However, I take the risk with some exceptions; all **the issues I mentioned last year are still raised under the same terms and in some cases, on even more serious terms.**

Please do not misunderstand my words, this is not a reproach and least of all a self-praise. But it is obvious, painfully obvious, that despite the efforts of the UN to revert terrorism, violence, intolerance, discrimination, poverty, inequality, injustice or organized crime, these scourges continue to harm many human beings.

Because the task of government and of rulers, that is to say, our task, the task that was entrusted to us by the citizens of our countries – must not be limited to make diagnosis and tell the people what is going on; **our primary and inexcusable duty is to establish conditions so that people may build their own lives in society and to accompany them in such process.**

Told like that it might seem little... **but it is much!! So much that we have not fully achieved our goals yet and maybe we shall never succeed. Nevertheless, we must try and while trying we shall be improving.**

Ladies and Gentlemen

Although we are aware of the great significance of other issues to be discussed at this Assembly, let me refer to a particular one, which maybe is not a piece of news, but no doubt is very important because, according to the data provided by the World Health

Organization, it is the main cause of death worldwide and particularly in low and middle income countries.

I am talking about **non-communicable diseases, mainly cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic pulmonary pathologies.**

These diseases, to a great extent, result from four risk factors directly related to supposedly “typical behaviors of modern lifestyle”: **smoking, alcoholism, unhealthy diet and sedentary lifestyle.**

The main effects of the risk factors are increasingly being suffered by low and middle income countries and the poorest people in all the countries, thus having a strong impact on the underlying socio-economic determinants.

Vicious circles are easily formed in these populations: poverty exposes people to behavioral risk factors of non-communicable diseases and in turn, these diseases tend to make poverty even worse.

Likewise, sanitary systems suffer the impact of high costly treatments required by non- communicable diseases. Let me point out some examples:

- A) Direct cost of smoking on Latin-American health systems is estimated in **33billion** dollars, which is equivalent to 0.5% of the GDP of our region and 7% of the amount estimated to be annually expended in health (taxes on tobacco are lower than 50% of the direct cost resulting from smoking)
- B) The global economic cost of cancer in Mexico, the Caribbean and Center and South America is estimated to have increased up to **286 billion** dollars in terms of direct costs (physician consultations, analysis, diagnoses, treatment, medicines, hospital stays, palliative cares, etc.) and indirect costs (transportation, lodging, loss of working hours and productivity, etc. )

Therefore, **unless epidemics of non-communicable diseases are strongly fought against in the countries and social groups which are most exposed or affected, the impact of said diseases will continue increasing and the plausible global goal –timely and properly agreed by this Assembly – of reducing poverty as a *sine qua non* condition for sustainable development, instead of getting closer, will move farther away every day.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If we take into account available statistic information, **one hundred four thousand one hundred and nine (104.109) individuals will die today as a consequence of non-communicable diseases highly related to the risk factors already mentioned.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> According to WHO data of January 2015, the NCD kill 38 million individuals every year. Almost 75 %, that is to say 28 million, take place in low and middle income countries. 82% of deaths due to NCD are directly related to the four risk factors already mentioned.

How can we not design and implement strategies to control alcohol and tobacco consumption and promote healthy lifestyles including a healthy diet and physical exercise?

This is not a medical panel or a scientific symposium. However, even though I am a political leader, a ruler, I have not forgotten my medical profession, to which I am still closely related, so please let me tell you **that not only it is possible to design and implement such strategies, but positive results are achieved.**

I am referring not only to sanitary strategies, but also to strategies with strong social and educational components, because smoking control needs to begin at home and at school. It is much better, from every stand point, no to start smoking rather than to quit smoking. And this dilemma, as many others which give shape to our lives, appear at a very early age.

These are not simple or easy strategies, however, they are essential and may give good results. We, Uruguayan people know that by our own and specific experience.

**Moreover, in addition to experience, we are working on some projects. And considering that this issue may not be dealt with in isolation, from this seat we invite all countries, governments and peoples to form an alliance against the non-communicable diseases. An alliance for a healthy life as wide, vigorous and dynamic as possible. And it is possible,... not easy, but possible.**

In many cases, conviction and political will result more necessary than financial resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Uruguay is a world leader in the implementation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

But there have been opponents to this leadership. For instance, the claim brought by Phillip Morris at the beginning of the year 2010 before the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) against two regulations adopted by Uruguay to control smoking.

In addition to the formal arguments brought by the tobacco company, its main reason was to punish a small country which has decided to control tobacco consumption. An exemplary warning for all the countries that are implementing or are ready to implement similar policies.

The dispute settlement process was long, winding and costly, but finally, last July 8, the Arbitral Tribunal of the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes made known the final award. It was decisively favorable to Uruguay, **none of the claimant's pretensions was accepted and most**

**important, the policies adopted by Uruguay were recognized as sovereign, legitimate and respectful of the international commitments undertaken by our country and of international law.**

But this was not just a coincidence. In that sense, from this SEAT **I thank WHO, many countries represented at this Assembly, and all the institutions and individuals who in one way or another have supported the Uruguayan cause in this controversy.**

**Thank you. Thank you very much.**

The best way to return such support and comply with our objective is to continue and deepen tobacco consumption control policies in order to progressively reduce it, to move forward for the total implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and invite the nations to join us in the combat against this scourge, **with no fear of threats or retaliations from powerful tobacco companies.**

There are still many pending tasks regarding this issue. And if we were able to comply them all, it would not be enough, because, as we already said, we must still work on other risk factors of non-communicable diseases.

We also commit ourselves to this task and ask you to join us.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Still being aware of the problems existing in other regions of the world and respect of which Uruguay is not indifferent, let me make some comments from and to our Latin-American region.

- **1) We congratulate the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia,** stating once again our disposition

and will to continue cooperating with the parties in the new and demanding stages of the process.

- 2) In our last year speech we expressed our desire that such session of the General Assembly would be the last one where the countries had to decide on the economic, trade and financial embargo imposed to Cuba by the United States.

**While this embargo remains unchanged, Uruguay will continue claiming its lifting, also in this forum.**

- **3)** We are not indifferent to the complex political and institutional situations raised in several brotherly countries. And as good brothers, we wish that such difficulties be sovereignly resolved, on the basis of democratic institutional framework and calm, respectful and sincere dialogue among the involved parties.

**The will of the citizens must be respected.**

Ladies and Gentlemen

Some considerations referred to this house that belongs to all of us, the United Nations Organization.

A) Uruguay renews its commitment to comply with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

It is essential to repeat within the framework of this General Assembly that eradication of poverty under all its forms and dimensions and the transversal incorporation of the Human Rights perspective, **must continue to be the unavoidable and guiding objectives of the implementation of the Agenda.**

B) The Paris Climate Change Conference- subscribed by Uruguay- is the first step taken by

the States to demonstrate their commitment to reduce contaminant emissions and diminish global temperature increase to less than 2° C by the end of this century

C) According to the reports produced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) the number of individuals who live out of their countries and of displaced people amounts to regrettable historical records.

**We welcome the Political Declaration adopted yesterday by the General Assembly at the High Level Meeting to deal with great movements of refugees and migrants.**

D) At present Uruguay is a non-permanent member of the Security Council reasserting its commitment to international peace and security.

We admit that it is not an easy task because in addition to the usual tensions among different

States and to intra-State conflicts, terrorism scourge threatens all the countries without exceptions.

**We need to stand united in the fight against terrorism.**

E) Since 1952 Uruguay has been committed to the United Nations Peace Keeping system, having contributed with more than forty three thousand(43.000)personnel in 20 operations.

We shall continue cooperating in favor of peace in the cases and **during the time it is duly justified and necessary. When these contingent measures become timelessness, instead of being a solution to the problem, the turn things worse. Or may become irretrievably conditional.**

F) As regards the election process of the next UN Secretary General, the man or woman on whom such responsibility shall lie, must have leadership and interaction skills to work with the States in

order to comply with the UN highest priority.  
(raison d'etre ?")

Ladies and Gentlemen

History has brought us to the present days where the dark side of humanity shows huge insufficiencies and extremely serious risks.

To ignore such insufficiencies and risks would be as irresponsible as to reluctantly accept them.

**Not all is won and not all is lost.** And it is good that way, because in the end life is not a balance of profits and losses.

Fortunately, life is much more than that.

With that conviction, **and trusting that we are able to dream, shape and build together, I**

**greet you on behalf of the Oriental Republic  
of Uruguay.**

Thank you very much

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