**Remarks as presented by Charge d’Affaires Linnisa Wahid**

At the Inter-Ministerial Dialogue Meeting to Strengthen Primary Healthcare

**June 17, 2024; 09:00-10:00 (one hour)**

**Taj Padmodzi Hotel Lusaka**

I am honored to be here to help you launch this very important meeting where three critical ministries are coming together to discuss how to operationalize and scale primary health care in Zambia.

We know that primary health care is an essential foundation for a healthy and productive life. The U.S. government remains a committed partner in advancing the capacity of the Zambian healthcare system to deliver essential health services to all Zambians. In support of this shared goal, we partner with Zambia to advance outcomes in maternal and child health, family planning, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, global health security, and malaria.

Why is this work so important? Globally, we’ve seen life expectancy fall for the first time since World War II due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic set back core public health work. There have been global declines in vaccination of children, declines in basic access to sick care, and a rise in infectious diseases. These setbacks in health services have impacted every country in the world, including Zambia.

Fortunately, we are now making up lost ground, and we aim to reach pre-pandemic levels of mortality globally by 2025.

So how do we do that? It's not going to happen by tackling this challenge disease by disease. It's going to require basic health building blocks at the community level. Primary health care can deliver the majority of interventions required for a healthy and productive life. In fact, primary health care can provide up to 90 percent of health services needed during someone’s lifetime.

Single-disease health services are not only inefficient but, in many cases, create barriers to people receiving health care. HIV services are one area where the U.S. government already integrates disease services into routine primary health care services, where appropriate. This integration is essential for achieving and sustaining HIV epidemic control. In Zambia, over 98 percent of people living with HIV are stable and virally-suppressed. Now, people living with HIV only need to visit a provider twice a year to get a routine viral load test and pick up their life-saving HIV medicines.

Zambia has already made significant progress in bringing primary health care services closer to communities by implementing its decentralization policy, which devolved these health services to the local authorities. Decentralization will ensure that services are more responsive to the needs of communities, which in turn should lead to better health outcomes. But there is more work to do.

The integration of HIV services, family planning, maternal and child health, and other health services into primary health care will result in improved efficiencies in the delivery of health services and increased accessibility of essential health services. If we are able to bring health care services closer to the community, people will be more likely to seek out care, leading to better health outcomes and, ultimately, a more prosperous nation.

Sustainable financing is critical for countries to facilitate the delivery of HIV and other services through routine primary health care. The U.S. government appreciates the efforts made by the Zambian government to increase allocation of resources to the health sector amidst current challenges such as the high debt burden, weakening of the local currency, and the impacts of climate change, including the ongoing drought.

We provide nearly 12 billion kwacha annually towards improving and supporting Zambia’s health sector, and over 80 percent of this amount goes towards ending the HIV epidemic. To achieve this vision of a robust primary health care system in Zambia, the U.S. government will support the Ministry of Health to develop policy and guidelines to integrate HIV and other diseases into primary health care. Through the United States Agency for International Development, the U.S. government supported the development of Zambia’s Health Care Financing Strategy (2017-2027) and continues to support its implementation through embedded staff at the Ministry of Health and the National Health Insurance Management Authority.

I encourage everyone at this meeting to identify innovative approaches for the implementation of the health care financing strategy with the goal of increasing focus and attention on primary health care. I hope that we come away from this meeting with a clear plan on how the Government of Zambia, the U.S. government, and other cooperating partners, can work together to operationalize the strategy.

I thank you for your kind attention.