THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
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MESSAGE ON WORLD CANCER DAY
4 February 2016

World Cancer Day, always an opportunity to rally the world, has special impetus this year thanks to the recent adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims to usher in a life of dignity for all people.

The Sustainable Development Goals endorsed by all governments call for reducing by one third premature death from non-communicable diseases. This builds on an historic commitment made in 2011 by Heads of State. We are also guided by the Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health, and the Every Woman Every Child movement behind it, which are working for stronger health systems, universal health care coverage and scaling up of life-saving interventions for comprehensive cancer prevention and control.

We must do more to end the many tragedies that cancer inflicts. About one third of cancers can be prevented, while others are curable if diagnosed and treated early. And even when cancer is advanced, patients should benefit from palliative care.

Cancer affects all countries, but those with fewer resources are hit hardest. Nothing illustrates this better than the burden of cervical cancer. The world’s poorest countries are home to more than 8 in 10 women newly diagnosed with cervical cancer, and 9 in 10 deaths from the disease.

While applauding the success of cervical cancer screening in many high-income countries, we have a responsibility to replicate this progress in low-income States, where cervical cancer remains one of the most common cancers among women.

Today, we have the knowledge, experience and tools to protect every woman, everywhere. Comprehensive cervical cancer prevention includes vaccines to protect girls against future infection with the human papilloma virus (HPV), screening measures and preventive treatment of pre-cancers.

Where a person lives should not determine if they develop a cancer or die from it. We must work together to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health issue and to reduce the burden that millions face from all cancers.

On World Cancer Day, let us resolve to end the injustice of preventable suffering from this disease as part of our larger push to leave no one behind.