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**STATEMENT BY ALLEN FOSTER**

**REPRESENTATIVE, CHRISTIAN BLIND MISSION (CBM)**

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates:

Christian Blind Mission (CBM) gratefully thanks the Member States in the WPR for supporting VISION 2020, The Right to Sight. This support has resulted in two important vision-related resolutions being adopted at the World Health Assemblies of 2003 and 2006, demonstrating the remarkable global alignment that blindness prevention has produced.

Although many countries in the Region have made good progress towards improving services for comprehensive eye care, in line with Vision 2020, the region still has a quarter of the world's blindness and the disability burden of visual impairment involves more than 161 million people worldwide, and ranks 6<sup>th</sup> after HIV-AIDS. We should also remember that disability is a direct cause and consequence of poverty.

Visual impairment and blindness can be addressed cost-effectively so that up to 80% is avoidable – curable like cataract or preventable like diabetic retinopathy and Vitamin A deficiency. Most occurs in developing countries and is strongly associated with poverty. Interventions will contribute to achieving all 8 Millennium Development Goals aimed at halving global poverty by 2015.

Governments and WHO can expect good returns on the relatively small investments needed to improve eye care management systems and integrate them into their Strategic Health Plans and Country Cooperation Strategies.

By including blindness and visual impairment in the implementation and monitoring of WHO's 11<sup>th</sup> General Programme of Work and in the Medium-term Strategic Plan, as urged in WHA 59.25, the goal of VISION 2020 will be reached on time.

CBM and other active NGOs already assist with technical and financial support across the Region. They will willingly shoulder their share of the increased spending required for the implementation of

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WHA 59.25 and ask Member States and WHO to consider supporting such implementation favourably, in the spirit of partnership and feasibility.

Thank you for your attention.