Mr President,

Singapore welcomes the note by the Secretary General on “Global Health and Foreign Policy” which outlines the vision and identifies the guiding principles for partnerships for global health. We thank the “Global Health and Foreign Policy” Group for their good work on the resolution on the “Protection of Medical Personnel and Health Workers”.

The theme of this year’s resolution is a timely reminder of the rising violence and deliberate attacks against healthcare workers in areas of conflict. All States have the responsibility to ensure their safety in accordance with their obligations under applicable international humanitarian law. Singapore strongly condemns all threats and acts of violence against healthcare workers. We urge all states to take stronger action to ensure that any such acts committed on their territory are fully investigated. We must bring perpetrators of such acts to justice and end impunity of such acts.
Mr President,

Our healthcare systems and workers are facing pressing challenges. This is exacerbated by the risk of the spread of infectious diseases which is multiplied in today’s interconnected world. Simply put, no countries are immune from the threat of outbreaks. Besides taking precious lives and straining our healthcare systems, these outbreaks can have a detrimental impact on economic and social stability. The Ebola virus outbreak, which has resulted in more than 6,000 deaths in the West African region, has brought these challenges into sharp relief. We extend our sympathies to the people who are struggling with the outbreak and stand in solidarity with countries that are most adversely affected.

Singapore has had our own experience dealing with disease outbreaks. In 2003, SARS, or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, struck our region. In Singapore, 238 people fell ill, and 33 succumbed, including five healthcare workers, in a period spanning barely four months. SARS not only resulted in the loss of precious lives but also dealt a blow to our economy and society. It tested the resolve of Singaporeans to overcome together our first major crisis as an independent nation. Fortunately, we got our act together quickly. Singaporeans from all walks of life rallied around efforts to rid Singapore of SARS. They understood the need to work together to tackle the crisis and restore their lives to normalcy. Many heroes emerged from the crisis, none more so than our selfless healthcare workers battling at the frontline. They cared for their patients, despite the considerable risk to themselves and to their families. We remember and salute all who remained steadfast in their posts in the fight against SARS despite the dangers.
Mr President,

Singapore would also like to reiterate our concern over the ongoing Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa. We wish to re-affirm our commitment to working with the WHO and the international community in combating this "unprecedented public health challenge", as was aptly put before by WHO Director General Dr Margaret Chan. Singapore has not stood still. We have contributed an aid package consisting of medicines, medical supplies and personal protective equipment to the affected regions and US$150,000 in cash to the WHO.

The best way to stem the Ebola outbreak is to stop it at the source. The progress made is a testament to the tireless efforts and personal sacrifices of frontline healthcare workers who put themselves at risk. On a broader scale, healthcare facilities around the world employ over 59 million workers who are exposed to a complex variety of health and safety hazards every day. Whilst they respond daily with skills, professionalism, courage and dedication, they are certainly not immune to injury, illness, or bullets. They deserve our gratitude, and they deserve to be treated with dignity, with respect, and above all, our protection. We hence reiterate our stance that any act of violence against people whose sole purpose is to save lives cannot be excused and should be prosecuted befitting the heinous nature of their crimes.

We hope this resolution will be an important step forward towards this goal.

Thank you, Mr President.