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May 4, 2021

The Honorable Ms. Linda Thomas-Greenfield
Ambassador of the United States of America
United States Mission to the United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

RE: Proposed UN Resolution on Vision and Eye Health

Dear Madam Ambassador,

On behalf of Prevent Blindness and our sight-saving mission, I write today in steadfast support of the proposed UN Resolution on Vision and Eye Health, and urge the full support of the United States in its passage.

Notably missing from the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established in 2015 is any mention of vision and eye health, which this resolution seeks to rectify. It would be the first ever resolution to recognize vision and eye health at the global governance level, and does so by embracing the SDGs. Eye health makes an important contribution to the eradication of poverty and lends well to many other SDG (e.g. improved quality in education; improved health and well-being; increased gender equity; reduced inequities within and among countries; and improved road safety). In fact, both the World Health Organization's World Report on Vision (<http://www.who.int/publications-detail/world-report-on-vision>) and The Lancet's commissioned Report on Global Eye Health (<https://www.thelancet.com/commissions/global-eye-health>) both explicitly recognize the important contribution eye health can make to the achievement of the SDGs and calls for concerted global action to address eye health.

The eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of poor eye health. **Over 2 billion people have a vision impairment and of these, at least 1.1 billion are living with vision loss because they do not have access to basic eye care services.** A staggering 90% of all unaddressed vision loss is in low- and middle-income countries, with the poor and extreme poor among the furthest left behind. This poses a considerable financial and societal burden; costing the global economy over \$411 billion dollars every year in lost productivity. Improved vision can lead to reductions in poverty and hunger by increasing workplace productivity and household income, improving employment prospects, and enhancing economic productivity.

At its core this resolution is about advancing **equitable access to eye care around the globe for all**, which would impact not only poverty rates, but so many of the other SDGs and societal needs. This is exactly why we at Prevent Blindness are so passionate about its adoption and the impact it will have. This resolution has the opportunity to go beyond data alone, and take a population health approach to understanding the contextual issues around social constructs that contribute to eye disease and vision challenges. It is critical to consider improvements in eye health by looking upstream and mitigating the primordial determinants of health disparity, preventing vision disorders wherever possible to reduce the overall social and economic impact of unnecessary vision loss. We must remedy the contemporary problems of patient mistrust and misunderstanding, provider-



patient discordance, and implicit bias, and their effects on increased risks for avoidable morbidity and widening of the health disparity gap in vulnerable populations. Finally, we must support the full spectrum of population health by supporting the needs of individuals with vision impairment, ensuring access to support that improves overall quality of life.

Since 1908, Prevent Blindness has been a leader in advocating for vision and eye health for those of all ages, backgrounds, and circumstances. Today more than ever we are seeing trends in population growth and demographic shifts that collide with new innovative sight-saving treatments, medical and public health research, and methods of accessing care such as community interventions and telehealth. Our mission to protect and enhance access to vision and eye care through advocacy, education, and empowerment has never been more vital.

It is our vision that all children are afforded the benefits of sight as they grow and learn; that all adults are educated about proper eye health and have access to care; that necessary attention is provided to issues surrounding the aging eye; that no one needlessly loses his or her sight due to unsafe practices; and that those with vision loss have the supports they need to live their highest quality of life. We envision a better quality of life through better vision health. Vision loss and eye disease impacts **everyone** – no matter your personal values; racial, ethnic, or cultural background; or socioeconomic or geopolitical circumstances – and thus, access to eyecare must be achievable for **all**.

As a U.S.-based NGO, and one with a decidedly domestic agenda, we also know far too well that we exist in a global community and have a duty to bring our voice to bear in advocating for vision and eye health for our neighbors across the world. We urge the US to lead on this vital aspect of global health, and move to ensure its passage.

Madam Ambassador, if there is anything we can do to advance your mission's support of this essential resolution and the ongoing work it seeks to accomplish, we stand ready to do so.

Sincerely yours,

Jeff Todd
President + CEO
Prevent Blindness

jtodd@preventblindness.org

cc: Ambassador Erica Barks-Ruggles
Senior Bureau Official
Bureau of International Organization Affairs
U.S. Department of State



Prevent Blindness

Our Vision Is Vision.

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development

The Honorable Bob Menendez (NJ)
Chairman, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

The Honorable James Risch (ID)
Ranking Member, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

The Honorable Gregory Meeks (NY-05)
Chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee

The Honorable Michael McCaul (TX-10)
Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs Committee

The Honorable David Price (NC-4)
Co-Chair, Congressional Vision Caucus

The Honorable Steve Stivers (OH-15)
Co-Chair, Congressional Vision Caucus

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis (FL-12)
Co-Chair, Congressional Vision Caucus

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