

Speech by Marisol Touraine

French Minister of Health and Social Affairs

Side Event of the United Nations High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth

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As read by Elisabeth Barbier, French Ambassador to South Africa, at the request of Marisol Touraine.

Honorable Minister, Aaron Motsoaledi,

Honorable Sibongile Ndela-Simelane, Minister of health of
Swaziland,

Dr Ren Minghui, MECs for Health,

Representatives of the WHO and of ILO,

Ladies and gentlemen,

All protocols observed,

We are here today because of our steadfast dedication to building **strong healthcare systems** capable of providing high-quality services that meet the needs of our populations throughout the world. In addition to guaranteeing the well-being of patients, **health professionals** are the driving force behind **the virtuous circle created by health and economic growth**. Healthcare is a significant contributor to growth and offers employment opportunities that extend far beyond health-sector professions.

It is therefore our responsibility to make the **strategic decisions** necessary to initiate this virtuous circle; to do so, we must completely transform the way we think about healthcare employment. This is precisely what President Hollande and President Zuma did in deciding to co-chair the **UN Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth**. The goal of this event is to urge the highest levels of power in governments and the international community to **bolster the recruitment of healthcare personnel**.

I wish to thank my South African counterpart for organising this meeting. I would also like to underline **three priority actions** needed to counteract the shortage of healthcare workers in both the Global North and South.

1. The first priority is to develop training and employment strategies that are better suited to the challenges currently facing the healthcare sector.

This has been one of my key areas of focus in France. Today, 14% of all jobs are related to health and social welfare. Nevertheless, certain regions and medical specialities have more trouble recruiting new workers than others, which can be a source of concern for French citizens. **I devised concrete solutions to address this situation.**

First, I redesigned the supply of healthcare services throughout the country. I encouraged young people to practice in regions where there was a scarcity of health professionals without restricting their freedom of movement, which is an important issue for French doctors.

Students can also receive a monthly subsidy of 1,200 euros if they agree to work in an area that doesn't have enough doctors. One thousand and seven hundred people have taken advantage of this offer.

Next, because medical personnel no longer want to practise in isolation (especially in remote areas), I changed the way healthcare professionals work. Specifically, I created **health centres** to allow workers from various healthcare professions to **work together as a team** in the same building. General practitioners, dentists, nurses, and psychologists can pool their skills together to better meet patients' needs.

I also increased healthcare availability by allowing select professions to provide new services. For example, I allowed **midwives** to provide vaccinations to mothers and their relatives as well as practise medically induced abortions.

I also created a new position, the **clinician nurse**; in the future, these professionals will be able to monitor and care for people living with chronic disease. This will reduce the burden on doctors, allowing them to focus on diagnosing patients and treating complex cases.

Finally, I worked to connect the health sector to employment opportunities in associations. Associations play a critical role in helping vulnerable populations gain better access to testing and preventative healthcare. **I am proud that France is a pioneer in this field**, and I'm happy to announce that two training programmes for community health and social workers have already been created.

With these many measures, I have significantly changed the sector to address the concerns of the French people and the expectations of health professionals.

Exchanging our experience on this subject is most useful because we have to adapt permanently.

2. The second priority is to prepare for the future by anticipating the impact of e-health on employment.

The digital revolution has reached the health sector, as evidenced by multiple developments, including biotechnologies, nanotechnologies, changes in cognitive science, and virtual reality, just to name a few. The digital revolution has not just resulted in new techniques, however. **It has also created new jobs.** The advent of **big data in the health sector** means that software development and information systems engineering are now health professions that are needed to analyse data and to ensure this information remains secure. **New stakeholders are also jumping into the health sector.**

Google, Facebook, and Amazon have become healthcare innovators; remember that it was Google that modelled the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic.

The e-health revolution has already created 30,000 jobs in our country. Change is here already; it is our responsibility to **support and encourage it.**

My goal is to assist the men and women working to improve our methods for healing patients as well as preventing and diagnosing disease. To that end, I presented a **national e-health strategy** a few days ago to help new actors in the digital world become better acquainted with the values and rules of the health industry.

My goal is also to help patients benefit from this health employment revolution. It is for this reason that I launched **remote healthcare** pilot programs, which have already allowed 2.5 million patients to consult a doctor remotely. **Working together, we must move forward to develop remote healthcare in other countries.** The Dermatology Centre at Henri Mondor Hospital is already organising virtual doctor visits with several of our overseas territories and countries in the Global South; these consultations specifically address issues faced by patients with darker skin tones. Professor Jacques Marescaux oversaw complex surgeries involving patients hospitalised in other countries while working remotely from Strasbourg. We should organise more experiments of this type.

3. The third priority is to support the transformation of health employment internationally.

To do this, we need a new approach to funding. Later, Richard Horton will present the main propositions from the report drafted by his group of experts. I would like to focus on one of these propositions, namely **dedicating a fixed share of international health funding to training personnel.** How many people could be trained today if 10% of the money international donors invested in healthcare was used to make health systems stronger? France, which is the health sector's second-largest international donor, is eager to explore this question further.

The next step is to create new, innovative tools. To that end, France would like to see the WHO create a genuine **health crisis management preparation centre** to harmonise the training of high-level employees involved in health security.

France is ready to financially support this development as part of health-emergency reforms and the work of this commission.

Finally, we must innovate so that the mobility of the medical workforce is a choice and not a financial necessity. In France, 10% of doctors were trained abroad, mostly in other European Union countries where mutual recognition arrangements and the free circulation of people are the norm. The European Union must set an example by holding strategic discussions about **discrepancies in the salaries** and distribution of healthcare professionals.

We would also like to **move forward with talks about the mobility of healthcare professionals within French-speaking countries**. To this point, I am delighted that a consultation with French-speaking countries was held in June in Abidjan. I would like to propose concrete solutions together with my French-Speaking counterparts, at the upcoming Summit of French-Speaking Countries next November in Antananarivo.

Ladies and gentlemen,

France is wholly committed to supporting every country that wants to develop a strong, solidarity-based health system. We must work together to achieve this goal. We need to do so for patients, who all have the right to receive better healthcare, and for health professionals, who deserve to be fully recognised.

Thank you.