On the sidelines of the 77th UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York, the Global Leaders Group (GLG) on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) hosted an event on political leadership and action on AMR to pave the way for bold and specific commitments at the UNGA High-level Meeting on AMR scheduled in 2024. Opening remarks were provided by GLG co-chairs, Their Excellencies Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, and Mia Amor Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados. The event was moderated by GLG member H.E. Dr Chris Fearne, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Health of Malta. More than 130 participants including Heads of Government, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Ministers of Health, Ministers of Development, Ambassadors, Principals of WHO and UNEP and representatives from the private sector, attended the meeting. The meeting highlighted the importance of building momentum towards the UNGA High-level Meeting on AMR in 2024 so that the political declaration from that meeting will galvanize meaningful commitment and action to reverse the trajectory of the AMR crisis. The need for a One Health approach, financing the global AMR response across sectors, improving access to existing antimicrobials and the development of new antimicrobials and alternatives to antimicrobials were among some of the priorities discussed during the meeting. The inclusion and implementation of specific commitments on AMR in G7 and G20 agendas, including in the upcoming G7 presidency of Japan and the G20 Presidency of India in 2023, were emphasized as key steps to catalyze political action for the global AMR response.

AMR is on the verge of being a global crisis

Welcoming participants to the event, H.E. Ms Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh noted that sustained political action and raising the awareness of the general public about AMR are needed to save millions of lives. While the GLG has been highlighting the issues effectively, more needs to be done, including identifying specific commitments and ensuring their implementation. She also noted the value of financing the implementation of national action plans through dedicated mechanisms like the AMR Multi-Partner Trust Fund.

The Prime Minister of Barbados, H.E. Ms Mia Amor Mottley urged political leaders to use their voices both in government and in their communities to help share the message on the threats of AMR, which currently contributes to at least 5 million deaths per year. Without action, the consequences of AMR will be devastating to human, animal, plant and environmental health. She also underscored the importance of financing and called for innovative mechanisms to support the global response to AMR. She emphasized that the private sector should contribute to a public global fund to help countries who cannot finance national action plans on AMR, to help those in the agriculture sector that may not realize their practices are contributing to AMR, and to support research for new antibiotics.
The Prime Minister of the Bahamas, H.E. Mr. Philip Davis urged greater political action on AMR. He noted that, without urgent action, AMR will no longer be a threat, but a global crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.

The High-level Meeting on AMR 2024 should be a game changer

In his remarks, H.E. Dr Chris Fearne, Deputy Prime Minister of Malta, recognized the role of the GLG in bringing AMR to the forefront of the global political agenda. He emphasized that the UNGA High-level Meeting on AMR in 2024 should be a game changer to bring about critical actions and specific commitments to preserve antimicrobials. He expressed confidence that the G7 and G20 presidencies in 2023 (Japan and India respectively) will continue to prioritize AMR as a critical area for political action.

We need to act with urgency

H.E. Mr Flemming Møller Mortensen, Minister for Development Cooperation in Denmark, also emphasized the need for urgent action on AMR and noted that tackling AMR requires a One Health approach. “We must recognize that cause and effect are intertwined”, he said, “and we must expand our knowledge on the link between human and animal health and interactions with the environment”. He noted Denmark’s initiative in supporting the International Centre for Antimicrobial Resistance Solutions (ICARS), which is focused on low- and middle-income countries, and said that the government of Denmark remains committed to the fight against AMR through novel solutions and global cooperation.
Lessons for AMR from the COVID-19 pandemic

H.E. Ms Victoria Grace Ford, the United Kingdom’s Minister of State for Development, noted that one in five deaths from AMR have been children under the age of five. She noted the importance of learning lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic to address the insidious, silent pandemic of AMR as the third leading cause of death globally. She highlighted the UK’s role in raising political visibility of AMR, including through the Fleming Fund and the UK presidency of the G7 in 2020, particularly in initiating dialogue among Health and Finance ministers. She noted that the road to the UNGA High-level Meeting on AMR in 2024 must align collective efforts, build on upcoming meetings and benefit from emerging initiatives, including the WHO pandemic instrument currently being negotiated. She called for strong collaboration among all stakeholders, including financial institutions, and for mainstreaming of AMR across United Nations organizations.

AMR to be included in upcoming G7 and G20 presidencies

Dr Eiji Hinoshita, Assistant Minister for Global Health and Welfare, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in Japan, noted that, as with Germany’s G7 presidency, Japan recognizes AMR as a key agenda item, especially in the areas of surveillance, research and development, and appropriate use of antimicrobials. Dr. Hinoshita also said that sustaining political momentum is essential.

AMR is intertwined with the triple planetary crises

The UN Environment Programme’s Executive Director, Ms Inger Andersen, explained that the overuse of antibiotics in humans and animals affects water systems and, in turn, the environment. She noted that because what we take from the environment contains the very antibiotics that humans and animals take, the environmental dimension is critical. “We know this from all of the environmental crises. No country is an island, no country can do [the work] on its own”, she said, noting that AMR can only be addressed through a multilateral approach. She noted that UNEP will issue its report on the environmental dimensions of AMR at the 3rd Ministerial Conference on AMR in Oman in November 2022. The report sets out standards for effluent discharge and the national and legal regulatory frameworks needed for a comprehensive approach. Ms Andersen noted that AMR is intertwined with the triple planetary crisis that the world faces, namely the crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste.

Prevention is critical in the fight against AMR

Prof José Manuel Barroso, Board Chair of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, discussed how preventing infections through vaccination programs is one of the most cost-effective ways to prevent use and misuse of antibiotics in human health. Vaccination programs are critical to the global fight against AMR by decreasing the spread of viruses. “The power of vaccination against AMR comes two-fold; first from the fact that vaccines protect people from infection in the first place, second by reducing the spread of infection. Vaccination reduces the opportunity for resistance development to spread”, he said.
AMR hinders progress on UN Sustainable Development Goals

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s Dr Ahmed Al Jedai, Assistant Deputy for Support Medical Services, Ministry of Health, noted that we can no longer accept inaction on AMR. He acknowledged the negative impact of AMR on livelihoods and on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. He emphasized the commitment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the global fight against AMR, including through the provision of financial resources.

Adequate funding is key to success

Dr Elizabeth Lindiwe Makubalo, Assistant Regional Director of the World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa, noted that AMR poses a huge health security threat and hinders socio-economic development in the African region. “The African region is large, and many countries are working with the resources available to them” she said, encouraging further investments from political leaders. According to Dr Makubalo, these investments will strengthen health systems to implementation of WASH, infection prevention and control, surveillance and the development of new antibiotics.

The private sector is taking action

Dr Jenelle Krishnamoorthy, Vice President for Global Public Policy at Merck/MSD discussed actions that the pharmaceutical industry is taking to tackle AMR. She recognized recent progress, including manufacturing guidelines for antibiotics, a roadmap on how to reduce the need for antibiotics in animals and the AMR Action Fund plan to develop new antibiotics by 2030. “This is going to take all sectors coming together to solve this problem, and the time to act is now,” she said.

The 3rd High-level Ministerial Meeting on AMR

H.E. Dr Saud Al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and H.E. Dr Hilal Al Sabti, Minister of Health, both of the Sultanate of Oman, invited fellow Ministers of Health, Agriculture and the Environment to the 3rd High-level Ministerial Conference on AMR in Muscat, Oman, from November 24 to 25, 2022. The meeting is an opportunity to accelerate global, regional and national political commitments to implement a One Health approach to control the spread of AMR. Its outcome document is expected to define targets for AMR and inform bold, specific commitments at the UNGA High-level Meeting on AMR in 2024.