Greetings, and welcome to the inaugural meeting of the Lancet Commission on Global Surgery.

In 2008, Paul Farmer and I published a paper which described surgery as the “neglected stepchild of global public health.”

We’ve seen modest progress since then. Yet still an estimated two to three billion people are shut out of the operating room. The world’s poorest countries have seventy percent of the world’s people, but only a quarter of operations happen in the developing world each year.

The poor suffer because of a shortage of skilled personnel, inadequate infrastructure, and a pay-as-you-go approach to financing surgical care.

I urge you to challenge this injustice, and to build a shared vision and strategy for global equity in essential surgical care. You can make the case that surgery is an indivisible, indispensable part of health care.

To accomplish this, it’s important to build on some impressive developments, for example:

- Aravind Eye Hospital in India has taken cataract surgery to the masses, at low cost and with extremely impressive outcomes;
- the first surgical residents began their hands-on training at the University Hospital at Mirebalais in Haiti, a collaboration between the government and Partners in Health;
- and Atul Gawande and his colleagues have done pioneering work on safe surgery checklists.

Working with the WHO, the World Bank Group has set two global targets for universal health coverage by 2030:

- first, no one will fall into poverty because of out-of-pocket health care expenses;
- and second, at least 80 percent of the poor in developing countries will have access to good quality, essential health services.

I hope the Commission will also agree on time-bound targets to measure progress on effective coverage of essential surgical interventions.

We have high expectations for your work. You can accelerate progress in universal access to essential surgical care -- and help to achieve universal health coverage in a generation.

Together, we can help millions of people lead healthier, more productive lives.

Thank you very much and have a great meeting.