Statement from the President of the WFSA to the WHO Executive Board, Geneva, 29 January 2015

Thank you. I am David Wilkinson, current President of the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (WFSA), representing anaesthesiologists from over 140 countries.

I would like to emphasise that the numbers in the excellent Secretariat report, that you consider today, are conservative estimates. Probably more than 2 billion people do not have access to basic surgery and safe anaesthesia and more than 11% of the world’s burden of disease stems from conditions that could be treated by surgery. We lack data, but this is being sought by the GIEESC, the Lancet Commission, WFSA and others, and is a priority for action for this agenda item.

It remains totally unacceptable that people are denied surgery and safe anaesthesia purely because they happen to live in a part of the world where such matters are considered to be luxuries. They are not luxuries they are essentials. We also recognise the increasing numbers of elderly patients in the world plus the needs of small children, both of which require specialised anaesthesia provision.

There is a great deal to do and momentum is gathering. The WFSA and others have formed the Global Alliance for Surgery, Obstetrics, Trauma and Anaesthesia Care (G4A). The work of Lifebox has brought pulse-oximetry to over 8,000 Operating Rooms, the WHO checklist is being used more widely – but Governments need to strengthen health systems and offer a comprehensive health care that includes essential surgery and safe anaesthesia as core components. We remain deeply concerned that some Governments continue to seek the scheduling of ketamine, often the sole, safest, and most appropriate anaesthetic, especially in LMICs and emergencies.

The members of our Federation, constituting many tens of thousands of anaesthesiologists, sincerely hope that this Board continues to support this agenda item. We pledge our support to enacting its practical implementation.