Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), praised Rwanda for its efforts in fighting non-communicable diseases (NCDs). He pointed out that Rwanda stands out in Africa, thanks to strong political will and investments in health.

He made these comments during an international conference on non-communicable diseases held in Kigali from February 13-15, 2025. This conference, now in its fourth edition, brought together over 700 participants from 69 countries around the world.

Speaking virtually, Dr. Tedros urged the global community to ramp up efforts to combat diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and respiratory illnesses, which claim millions of lives each year. However, he also celebrated the progress Rwanda has made in this fight.

“Every year, non-communicable diseases cause 17 million deaths of people under 70,” Dr. Tedros said. “That means one person dies every two seconds. And 85% of these deaths happen in developing countries. But most of these deaths are preventable. We can avoid them by reducing risk factors like smoking, drinking alcohol, poor diets, lack of exercise, and pollution.”

He added, “Some African countries, including Rwanda, are doing well in this fight. The key to success is commitment, political will, investment, and the involvement of everyone.”

Dr. François Uwinkindi, the head of the non-communicable diseases division at Rwanda’s Biomedical Center (RBC), explained that Rwanda’s success comes from early prevention efforts. He encouraged people to take advantage of the opportunities available to protect their health.

He said, “Studies show that 40% of deaths from non-communicable diseases can be avoided. Simple actions like avoiding smoking, limiting alcohol, exercising, managing weight, and getting vaccinated against cancer can make a big difference. Early detection and treatment are key. For example, cancers like breast cancer and cervical cancer are treatable if found early, and Rwanda has the capacity to treat these diseases.”

He continued, “That’s why we’re encouraging people to get checked for non-communicable diseases early. The treatment is available, and recently, the government added cancer treatment to the health insurance package.”

In Rwanda, nearly 60% of deaths from illness are caused by non-communicable diseases. On a global scale, these diseases account for around 70% of deaths.