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REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Africa**

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**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA**

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Seventieth Session

Virtual session, 25 August 2020

**STATEMENT BY MRS JACQUELINE LYDIA MIKOLO, MINISTER OF HEALTH,  
POPULATION AND WOMEN'S PROMOTION AND INTEGRATION IN  
DEVELOPMENT OF CONGO, CHAIRPERSON OF THE SIXTY-NINTH SESSION OF  
THE WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA, AT THE OPENING OF THE  
SEVENTIETH SESSION OF THE WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA**

Director-General of WHO;

WHO Regional Director for Africa;

Honourable Ministers of Health of Member States of the WHO African Region and dear colleagues;

Distinguished delegates to this Seventieth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa;

Dear partners;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

As we commence this session, I would like to remind us all that the Sixty-ninth session of the WHO Regional Committee came to an end on 23 August 2019 in Brazzaville.

The Congolese people, who were honoured by the adoption of the vote of thanks addressed to **His Excellency Denis SASSOU NGUESSO**, President of the Republic and Head of State, for the inspiring and encouraging statement he delivered, and by my election as Chairperson of the Sixty-ninth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, expressed their delight at that mark of confidence.

On that occasion, all the delegates felt a sense of pride in adopting decisions and resolutions that are expected to address the numerous health challenges faced by our various Member States on a continuous basis.

In the aftermath of the Sixty-ninth session, each Member State devoted its efforts to implementing those resolutions, while giving pride of place to interventions that fast-track the achievement of universal health coverage and the development of national action plans for health security (NAPHS), in line with the resolution on the Regional strategy for integrated disease surveillance and control: 2020–2030, which is based on the “One Health” approach.

With the exception of the Ebola outbreak that was raging in one province of the DRC, there was absolutely no warning sign of a health crisis of global proportions with such tragic socioeconomic consequences.

In spite of all the measures implemented, our Member States have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which is putting a strain on our already fragile health systems.

**Director-General of WHO;  
WHO Regional Director for Africa;  
Honourable Ministers of Health of Member States of the WHO African Region and dear colleagues;  
Ladies and Gentlemen;**

In the context of COVID-19, several signals point to a weakening of our health indicators, due to the impact of the pandemic.

Our health facilities are sending out the first signal, which relates to a drop in health care consultations in general, and in maternal and child health care consultations in particular.

Access to health care for certain diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and neglected tropical diseases is becoming constrained in the context of restrictions on population movements.

EHealth, which should make up for the shortfall in the delivery of remote health care, is still not operational in our States, owing to the lack of resources to finance it.

This further complicates relations between health-care providers and patients in the context of travel restrictions and social distancing. It is therefore necessary to envisage other alternatives, including strengthening home care.

While it is true that the response in our States is plagued by a number of weaknesses, the situation observed to date nonetheless, is proof that the nightmare scenario predicted by some scientists at the onset of the pandemic has not materialized, thanks to the efforts of governments and the support of WHO.

Contrary to those predictions, the results obtained so far in Member States of the WHO African Region are very encouraging, thanks to the commitment, involvement and responsibility of all our Heads of State who, very early on, adopted appropriate measures as soon as the pandemic was declared.

On behalf of ministers of health of Member States of the WHO African Region, I would like to convey to them our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude for having:

1. established coordination mechanisms commensurate with the phenomenon in our countries;
2. taken courageous and restrictive measures and decisions to contain the spread of the disease;
3. prioritized the management of the health emergency in the allocation of financial resources, before other sectors;
4. mobilized and motivated the human resources involved in the response.

Likewise, we commend the leadership of the Director-General of WHO, **Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**, and **Dr Matshidiso Moeti**, the WHO Regional Director for Africa, whose guidance led to the roll-out of response plans consistent with the magnitude of the phenomenon in our countries.

I also take this opportunity to pay deserved tribute to the health workers of all countries, who became infected in the health-care setting and lost their lives because they chose to provide care.

**I INVITE US ALL TO OBSERVE A MINUTE OF SILENCE IN MEMORY OF ALL THOSE HEALTH WORKERS AND ALL VICTIMS OF THE PANDEMIC**

**Ladies and Gentlemen;**

In light of the weaknesses observed, the WHO African Region must mobilize and work in solidarity to:

- produce consumables and protective equipment;
- share the results of research;
- pool together resources for screening and management.

In addition to the statutory themes, this session will be devoted to two topical events, namely (i) the special event on the COVID-19 response, and (ii) celebrating the eradication of wild poliovirus in our Region.

Without wishing to get ahead of our celebration, I would be remiss if I concluded my statement without paying tribute to all those who made it possible to end the circulation of wild poliovirus in our countries.

In the same spirit of solidarity, let us continue to join forces to overcome COVID-19, while working to address outstanding challenges that may prevent us from achieving universal health coverage in 2030.

I wish every success to the Seventieth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa.

**I DECLARE OPEN THE SEVENTIETH SESSION OF THE WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA.**

Thank you.