



**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA**

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**STATEMENT BY DR TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS  
WHO DIRECTOR-GENERAL**

Your Excellency Amira Elfadil,  
Honourable chairwoman, Minister Jacqueline Lydia Mikolo,  
Honourable Minister Professor Mijiyawa Moustafa,  
Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,  
Dr Moeti,  
Excellencies, distinguished guests, dear colleagues and friends,

Our continent is facing a health crisis unlike any we have faced before.

Yesterday, we crossed 1 million reported cases in the Region, with more than 20 000 deaths.

The number of cases has doubled just in the past 6 weeks.

With the challenges we face obtaining testing kits, it's likely that the real numbers are significantly higher.

But of course, numbers don't even begin to tell the real story.

The impact of the pandemic goes far beyond the suffering caused by the virus itself.

Essential services have been suspended or disrupted, putting countless lives at risk.

The paucity of data means we can only guess at the true extent of excess mortality.

The pandemic threatens to undo the gains we have made in recent years towards health equity and the Sustainable Development Goals.

But this is far more than a health crisis.

We often say health is intimately connected to every area of life. The pandemic is proving how true that is.

According to the World Bank, the Region is now in its first recession for 25 years.

In April, the International Monetary Fund predicted that the economy in sub-Saharan Africa would contract by 1.6% this year – the worst on record.

In June the IMF doubled that forecast, predicting a contraction of 3.2%.

As usual, the poorest and most vulnerable are bearing the brunt of the suffering.

In many low- and middle-income countries and communities, so-called lockdown measures have cost people their livelihoods, deepening hunger for millions and creating new epicentres of malnutrition.

Since the earliest days of the pandemic, WHO has been working round the clock at all three levels to support you, our African Member States.

All countries in Africa now have a preparedness and response plan in place, compared with less than a dozen in the first few weeks of the pandemic.

All countries on the continent now have lab testing capacity for COVID-19, compared with just 2 at the beginning of the pandemic.

Over the past few months, WHO has shipped millions of test kits and tons of protective equipment to many countries in Africa.

Over 250 international experts have been deployed to 41 countries; and an additional 900 staff have been repurposed to work on COVID-19.

We have developed more than 25 guidelines contextualized to the African Region.

We've trained thousands of health workers.

Of course, COVID-19 is not the only emergency to which we are responding.

More than 100 people have now been infected and 43 people have died in a new outbreak of Ebola in the Equateur Province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Although the previous outbreak in this area was stopped in just three months, this outbreak is proving more challenging because of the pandemic and an ongoing strike by health workers, which is contributing to a significant delay in alerts being reported.

We urgently need more human resources and logistics capacity to support the response in an ever-expanding geographic area.

WHO and our partners are working intensively to support the Government to find cases quickly and shorten the delay.

We all saw with the outbreak in North Kivu and Ituri that with strong leadership, close partnership, new tools including vaccines and therapeutics, and with the incredible dedication of health workers, the people and Government of DRC have the ability to stop Ebola even in the most difficult circumstances.

Today we are also celebrating another public health triumph: the eradication of wild poliovirus in Africa.

This is an incredible achievement, and a much-needed cause for celebration.

The infrastructure built up and the lessons learned through the polio eradication effort are vital tools that countries must apply to the many other health challenges they face, and to strengthening health systems to progress towards universal health coverage.

Excellencies, dear colleagues and friends,

Thank you all for your commitment. As we work together to confront this pandemic, I give you my assurance that WHO will continue to support you in every way possible to suppress transmission and save lives.

COVID-19 has taken so much from us. But it has also reminded us that health is not a luxury item; it's the foundation of social, economic and political stability.

We're all in this together. And with national unity and global solidarity, we will overcome this pandemic together.

Thank you. Merci beaucoup.