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**SPEECH OF MR ASSANE NGUEADOUM, MINISTER OF HEALTH OF THE
REPUBLIC OF CHAD, CHAIRMAN OF THE SIXTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE WHO
REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE
SIXTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA**

Your Excellency, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia;
Distinguished Chairpersons of the major institutions of the Republic of Ethiopia;
Honourable Ministers in charge of Health;
The WHO Director-General;
The WHO Regional Director for Africa;
Representatives of multilateral and bilateral international cooperation organizations;
Distinguished guests, all protocol respected;
Dear delegates,

It is my honour to take the floor before this august assembly at the opening ceremony of the Sixty-sixth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa.

Allow me, at the outset, to make two special references, one to His Excellency, the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, for honouring us by personally chairing this ceremony, and the other to Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General, for reaffirming her friendship and constant availability for the African Region, renewed several times on such occasions.

Furthermore, I would like, in my capacity as Chairman of the Sixty-fifth session of the Regional Committee, on behalf of Ministers in charge of Public Health of the 47 Member States of our Region, to heartily thank the political, administrative and traditional authorities for the very warm welcome accorded us since our arrival in Addis-Ababa, the capital of Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with a lot of gratitude that I thank all the ministers in charge of health who honoured my country by entrusting the chair of our Organization to me. It is therefore with humility, dear colleagues, that I am rendering account of my mandate to you.

In fact, you will remember that the Ministers in charge of Health met at the Sixty-fifth session of the Regional Committee from 23 to 27 November 2015 in N'Djamena, Chad, thus endorsing the Cotonou Decision that gave Chad the mandate to organize the said session.

It was on that occasion that I was elected Chairman of the Sixty-fifth session of the Regional Committee. I want to express my sincere gratitude to you for this great token of trust.

At that time, I had no idea of the sensibilities associated with this honorary post. However, the key role played by the Regional Secretariat of our Organization greatly facilitated my task.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to very sincerely thank the WHO Regional Director for Africa and her entire team for the very important technical support given me throughout my mandate.

Dr Moeti, I would really like to express to you my sincere thanks and congratulations for the work done for the benefit of Africa and commend the perfect implementation of the recommendations of the Sixty-fifth session of the Regional Committee.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to underscore three challenges that appeared very sensitive to me and which did not in any way undermine the cohesion of Member States around our common Regional Organization during my tenure as Chair of the Sixty-fifth session of the Regional Committee.

The first challenge is related to the assertion of the leadership of our Heads of State. In fact, in spite of the Cotonou Decision, Chad's tenure as Chair of the Sixty-fifth session of the Regional Committee was not guaranteed, due to security concerns in the aftermath of the attacks associated with the Boko-Haram sect in the capital.

However, the unflinching support of the Heads of State of friendly countries helped to maintain the project, better still to beat the record of participation in sessions of the past five years. Thank God, this challenge was met to the satisfaction of all.

The second challenge emerged during the Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly. Enormous stakes related to the election of the new Regional Director almost divided us.

However, the Region spoke with one voice in the statement by the Chairman of the Sixty-fifth session of the Regional Committee as reflected in Decision Ex. C1/949 of the African Union Heads of State Summit on African candidatures in international organizations making Mr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, Africa's candidate.

Lastly, the third challenge relates to the Transformation Agenda of the WHO Secretariat in the African Region 2015-2020 presented by the Regional Director at the Sixty-fifth session held in N'Djamena. You would also recall that following that presentation, the proposal was endorsed by all. Thus, each of us should contribute to its success.

As Chairman of the Sixty-fifth session of the Regional Committee, I initiated and obtained the support of the WHO to conduct an advocacy mission with a number of States with the aim of finding lasting solutions to our Organization's challenges and to enable it to serve us better.

To that end, I would like to share with you our small experience in terms of lessons learned by the end of our tenure that could help accelerate the reform process.

The first lesson is our weak ownership of our Regional Organization's Secretariat. This is all the more true as the effectiveness of the latter is presently under threat. And yet we need a strong Secretariat that can fully play its advisory role with our States in order to strengthen our health systems. Hence as ministers of health, we should be mindful of the "health" of the said Secretariat and ensure that it is sound and capable of delivering better.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I need not remind you that real efforts have been made to strengthen the health systems of our Region, but there is a lack of visibility that often leads us to look elsewhere for models instead of relying on what is peculiar to our Region.

WHO must therefore highlight the capacities and competencies of our States so that they will be known to all and thereby facilitate regional cooperation.

Furthermore, WHO must support us to better organize and develop our fragile health systems into pools of complementary skills, because our individual States cannot be self-sufficient in the current context marked by health emergencies.

In sum, we should enhance and develop South-South cooperation in order to ensure better sharing of good practices.

The second lesson is that health challenges have greatly increased in Africa, and if we wish to address them effectively, some priorities will need special attention.

There is need to:

- (a) increase and sustain domestic health financing;
- (b) ensure effective contribution to the African Public Health Emergency Fund;
- (c) share experiences and good practices among countries. An example for Chad is in the area of coordination and leadership by the Head of State in the health sector (monthly meetings on health);
- (d) highlight the fight against HIV/AIDS in West and Central Africa;
- (e) own the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) by establishing its core capacities;
- (f) support the proposal by the Director-General calling for an increase in contributions by States as part of the WHO regular budget;
- (g) ensure enhanced political commitment in the implementation of the resolutions and decisions of the Regional Committee and the World Health Assembly.

Ladies and Gentlemen and Ministers of Health,

The priorities I have outlined were submitted to the highest authorities of three States of our Region in the course of our mission. The views garnered were on the whole satisfactory. It is now up to each one of us to adopt the most suitable approach for submitting these priorities to our countries' authorities for their support.

In this regard, I suggest that WHO and future chairpersons of the Regional Committee involve themselves more in advocacy with Member States in order to back our efforts to mobilize domestic resources for health.

I would like to end by once again thanking:

- (a) The ministers of health for the trust placed in me that enabled me to successfully complete my mandate;
- (b) Dr Moeti and her entire team for their readiness and professionalism in the service of the health of the people of our Region and by expressing my sincere encouragement to them. I urge them to pursue their efforts in the reform initiated in order to improve our health systems for the well-being of the people of our continent.

On this note I wish the Sixty-sixth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa every success.

Thank you for your kind attention!