

**SEVENTIETH SESSION OF THE WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA  
BRAZZAVILLE, REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

**25 AUGUST 2020 AND RESUMED SESSION 24 NOVEMBER 2020**

**Summary Report from Hon. Jacqueline Lydia Mikolo**

**Minister of Health and Population**

**Republic of Congo**

The Seventieth session of the Regional Committee (RC70) met virtually on 25 August 2020, and on 24 November 2020. Hon. Jacqueline Lydia Mikolo from Congo chaired both sessions with the support of the vice chairs Professor Benjamin Hounkpatin and Dr Lia Tadesse from Benin and Ethiopia respectively. This statement summarizes the main outcomes of the two meetings.

**PART 1: TOPICS FOR GLOBAL DISCUSSION**

**Development of a draft global patient safety action plan**

RC70 reviewed the consultation process and main elements for the development of a draft global patient safety action plan. This document is in response to the Seventy-Second World Health Assembly, that requested the Director-General to formulate a global patient safety action plan in consultation with Member States.

Delegates supported the proposed consultation process and main elements for the draft action plan, through a Written Silence Procedure.

**Development of the programme budget 2022-2023**

The RC70 reviewed the process and approach for the development of the programme budget 2022-2023, which is taking place in a transition period during which WHO is continuing to fight the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It noted that this period offers an opportunity for rethinking the role of WHO to be better equipped to help the world prevent health pandemics and to build resilient health systems to truly advance towards sustainable development. It stressed the need to reflect important changes already taking place and wait for the outcome of the evaluation of global COVID-19 response by the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response. To balance these objectives, it proposed maintaining a biennial cycle for the programme budget 2022–2023 with clear expectation that a revised budget will be submitted to the Health Assembly in May 2022.

Delegates took note of the limitations in the consultations and requested the Secretariat to use all means and avenues for more consultations. They called for an increase in resources for malaria, TB and non-communicable diseases as well as invest more on research and development. Member States (MS) expressed their support for the extension of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work to 2025.

### **Transforming for enhanced impact**

The document focused on ways in which the Secretariat is transforming across the three levels of the Organization to deliver enhanced impact at country level. It noted that in designing WHO's transformation agenda, the Global Policy Group identified six major shifts needed for WHO's overall operating model, and that have resulted in several major transformation initiatives including putting the needs of the countries at the core of all WHO work.

Delegates accepted the report through a Written Silence Procedure

## **PART 2: TOPICS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE**

### **The Work of WHO in the African Region 2019-2020: Report of the Regional Director**

The RC reviewed the report of the Regional Director, which outlined the significant results achieved by WHO in the African Region, guided by the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2020 (GPW 13). In line with the regional and now global Transformation Agenda, WHO in the African Region is putting people at the centre of change through five key initiatives. The technical priorities of WHO's work in the Region include universal health coverage, wild poliovirus eradication, protecting people from health emergencies and putting in place high-priority, high-impact health interventions, among others. The report further noted that looking forward, the COVID-19 pandemic is affording opportunities to strengthen capacities, leverage good practices and advance health and development in the Region.

Delegates congratulated the Regional Director for the achievements despite the many challenges. They called for the local manufacture of supplies to tackle pandemics like COVID-19. They also requested the Secretariat to further strengthen its support to countries affected by humanitarian crises.

### **Special Events on the COVID-19 Response in the WHO African Region**

His Excellency Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, addressed the RC70 special event of the RC70 on COVID-19, as Guest Speaker on August 24, 2020. Speaking through pre-recorded video, he noted that COVID-19 does not recognize borders, does not differentiate between villages, economic status or skin colour, and is a common enemy of mankind and commended WHO for declaring COVID-19 a global pandemic. His Excellency enumerated the measures taken to minimize the impact of the pandemic on the society and economy and noted the precautionary measures at the Bole International Airport, one of the largest hubs on the continent. Similarly, delegates outlined some best practices employed in their different countries to control the spread of COVID-19. The Regional Director presented key achievements which she attributed to the high level of political leadership coordinated at the level of the African Union, together with a continental approach involving partnership, solidarity and collaboration among African countries.

At the resumption of the RC70 on November 24, 2020, delegates again, held a special event on COVID-19. This event was dedicated to taking stock of development since the first special event. It was noted that over 58 million people have been infected with over 1.4 million deaths globally. The WHO African Region accounts for less than 3% of both cases and deaths. However, it was stressed that the pandemic has led to social, political and economic upheavals throughout Africa, with countries' economies contracting by as much as 30%. While commending the governments and people of the Member States on the decisive preparedness actions taken in averting a catastrophic situation till date, the Regional Director noted that one of the key challenges the Region currently faces is “pandemic fatigue” with falling observance of public health measures such as wearing of masks, frequent hand hygiene and physical distancing. She also highlighted that attention is needed to ensure communities have the resources and abilities to continue adhering to public health preventive measures.

**The Regional Committee also adopted the following documents through a Written Silence Procedure on 6 October 2020:**

**Fifth Progress report on the implementation of the Transformation Agenda of the World Health Organization Secretariat in the African Region: 2015–2020**

Following a mid-term review conducted in 2017, it was recommended that the gains of the first phase of the Transformation Agenda (2015-2018) be consolidated and the lessons learned applied to deliver quality outputs, improve the management of resources and strengthen the value-for-money approach. The second phase of the Transformation Agenda was thus launched in 2018, placing people – staff and populations in Member States – at the centre of change. This document highlighted the achievements recorded to advance the second phase of the Transformation Agenda of WHO in the African Region, which include the strengthening of change management processes and enhancing a value-based culture; enhancing the country focus approach for greater impact; and the Team Performance Programme (TPP) for enhancing collaboration within and across technical areas.

**Strengthening country presence to deliver universal health coverage in Africa**

The document noted that Universal Health Coverage (UHC) targets have been integrated into the national health strategies of most Member States. However, WHO support to the implementation of national strategies will be maximized by aligning its presence to the specific needs of MS. A functional review of all its 47 country offices in 2019 highlighted key challenges to achieving UHC in the countries, and stakeholders' expectation of the role WHO should play in addressing them. Recommendations were made for flexible resource reallocation and a revision of each country office structure to focus on WHO core functions.

### **Certification of wild poliovirus eradication in the African Region and sustaining the gains, post-certification**

The document summarized the progress made towards certification of eradication of wild polioviruses in the African Region since the endorsement of the regional certification framework and proposed priority interventions towards certification and post-certification.

### **Ensuring implementation of national polio transition plans in the African Region**

The document noted that with the imminent certification of wild poliovirus eradication in the African Region in 2020, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) funding for polio programmes in the African Region will reduce significantly. This calls for urgent implementation of national polio transition plans by Member States of the Region. It provided guidance to Member States on initiating and accelerating the implementation of their transition plans.

### **Quality, equity and dignity in health services delivery in the WHO African Region: bridging the quality gap to accelerate progress towards meeting the SDG targets for maternal, newborn and child health**

The document noted that despite the global commitment to improve delivery of quality health services for mothers, newborns and children, progress in the African Region remained inadequate. The paper outlined the issues and challenges faced in the Region in terms of the delivery of quality care to mothers, newborns and children, and proposed priority actions for implementation during the period 2020–2025.

### **Framework for the implementation of the global action plan on physical activity 2018–2030 in the WHO African Region**

The document argued that the African Region is undergoing an epidemiological transition with a double burden of communicable and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) threatening overstretched health systems that remain fragile, fragmented, under-resourced, and limited in terms of infrastructure and capacity to address the increasing burden of NCDs. Staying physically active is essential to preserving health. In line with the Global action plan for physical activity (GAPPA) 2018–2030, the regional Framework provides Member States with effective policy actions to increase physical activities as well as guide them in the planning and implementation of priority interventions to promote physical activity.

### **Strategy for scaling up health innovations in the WHO African Region**

The document noted that despite the potential returns on investing in health innovations, available evidence show that African countries invest far less in innovation (approximately 0.01% per capita) than developed countries. Most of them lack appropriate human capital, requisite infrastructure and strategies to effectively harness opportunities presented by emerging

technologies and non-technological innovations. The proposed strategy guides Member States to effectively harness and scale up high-impact innovations that address unmet health needs and accelerate health outcomes.

### **Status of human organ and tissue donation and transplantation in the WHO African Region**

The document recalled resolutions WHA63.22 and A/RES/71/322 that articulate the urgent need to improve the availability, quality and safety of organ and tissue donation and transplantation, as well as to prevent and combat trafficking in human organs. It then proceeded to highlight the status of implementation of the above-mentioned resolutions pertaining to organ and tissue donation and transplantation, identify obstacles and challenges. It finally proposed priority actions to be taken by MS and partners to ensure the ideals of the aforementioned resolutions are met in the Region.

### **Report on the performance of health systems in the WHO African Region**

The report assessed the four dimensions of health systems performance. The four dimensions include: (i) access to essential services; (ii) quality of these essential services; (iii) community demand for the essential services; and (iv) resilience to shocks. The report presents findings for each Member State of the Region, noting some challenges as well as recommendations for improved performance.