RESOLUTION

STRENGTHENING PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORIES IN THE WHO AFRICAN REGION: A CRITICAL NEED FOR DISEASE CONTROL (document AFR/RC58/6)

The Regional Committee,

_Aware_ of the crucial role that laboratories play in disease prevention, control, alert and response to epidemics and health research;

_Acknowledging_ the important role of laboratories in Integrated Disease Surveillance and implementation of the International Health Regulations;

_Concerned_ about the frequent occurrence of outbreaks in the Region that are not immediately detected and responded to due to inadequate laboratory capacities;

_Recognizing_ the weak organizational, financial and human resource capacity and low investment in laboratory services;

_Concerned_ about the unclear oversight arrangement and the role of laboratory services within the national health systems in some Member States;

_Cognizant_ of the need for Member States to ensure availability of quality laboratory services;

_Acknowledging_ the need for national laboratory policies to guide the development and proper functioning of national laboratory networks in Member States;

1. **ENDORSES** the report of the Regional Director on strengthening public health laboratories in the WHO African Region;

2. **URGES** Member States:

   (a) to develop or strengthen comprehensive national laboratory policies that should focus on laboratory functions, organization, structures, networking, coordination, technologies, maintenance, biosafety, biosecurity and quality management;

   (b) to ensure adequate funding for public health laboratory services from all available government budgetary means;
(c) to use the existing opportunities of global health funding mechanisms to mobilize required resources for laboratory services in support of public health programmes such as Integrated Disease Surveillance, International Health Regulations, disease prevention and control, and epidemic response;

(d) to develop plans to fully equip and staff national public health reference and clinical laboratories;

(e) to assign specific responsibilities to national public health reference laboratories related to the technical coordination, quality assurance, training and support to peripheral laboratories;

(f) to strengthen the public health laboratory supply and distribution system in order to ensure continuous availability of laboratory equipment, reagents and supplies;

(g) to support national public health laboratories to develop capacity for quality management, disease prevention and control, alert response to epidemics and health research;

(h) to strengthen laboratory human capacity at all levels by identifying and addressing laboratory training and continuing education needs, as well as developing mechanisms to minimize the brain drain of laboratory personnel;

(i) to ensure preventive and curative maintenance of laboratory equipment by training biomedical engineers and technicians, and strengthening laboratory staff capacity to perform preventive maintenance;

(j) to strengthen laboratory management information systems that will allow for the collection of regular and accurate data for use in monitoring, evaluating and planning of quality laboratory services;

3. REQUESTS the Regional Director:

(a) to provide technical support for the development of national laboratory policies, plans, norms and standards;

(b) to promote the establishment and networking of national and regional public health reference laboratories;

(c) to support Member States in mobilizing, accessing and sustaining resources required to strengthen laboratory services;

(d) to report to the Regional Committee at its sixty-first session (in 2011) on the progress in implementing this resolution.

Third meeting, September 2008