Statement by Sierra Leone on behalf of the 47 Counties in WHO African Region on Reports of the External and Internal Auditors and progress on External and Internal Audit Recommendations

Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly

Agenda items 30.1, 30.2 and 30.3

Chairperson

Director General

Hon Ministers

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Sierra Leone has the honour to present this statement on behalf of the 47 Member States of the African Region.

The WHO African Region acknowledges the reports of the external and internal auditors on the financial operations of WHO for the year ended 31 December 2020.

We wish to thank the WHO for the unqualified audit reports on the financial statements for the period under review.

Nevertheless, critical issues in both reports bordering on accountability, transparency and credibility of WHO were observed, which require urgent attention:

1) There is need to address the **issue of conflict of interest**. The report for example highlights a situation whereby a firm providing consultancy services to WHO was at the same time advising the supplier in the procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) involving substantial amount of money (US$ 2.53m).

Hence, compromising quality assurance and procurement technical evaluation procedures;

2) Similarly, **emergency procurement** of COVID-19 testing kits did not follow the laid down principles and guidelines in the opinion of the external auditor;
3) Increasing trend of alleged cases of fraud schemes, non-compliance with procurement rules and regulations and **sexual harassment**.

These unfortunate observations among others, made by the external and internal auditors, should be investigated and addressed expeditiously. We noted during the PBAC discussions that the investigative capacity within the secretariat is very low compared to its needs. We urge the secretariat to ensure that IOS be adequately staffed to carry out investigations in a timely manner. In addition, risk mitigation actions are required, at a time when all Member States are calling for an expansion of the mandate of WHO with increased predictable and flexible funding.

We welcome the recommendations of the auditors to adequately address the external and internal audit findings, fast-tracking investigations and instituting disciplinary actions as well as implementing strategies to ensure sustained funding.

The progress made by the secretariat in implementing key audit recommendations despite additional workload and expectations in country offices due to COVID-19 response should be commended.

Thank you for your kind attention.