STATEMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA ON AGENDA ITEMS 19, 20 AND 21: THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF THE NAGOYE PROTOCOL, ENHANCEMENT OF LABORATORY BIOSAFETY AND POLIOMYELITIS.

Thank you Chairperson, Zambia aligns this statement to that made by Angola on behalf of the Africa Region.

The work of the Secretariat in the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol to enhance public health deserves special recognition, and we wish to add our voice to recommending that this continues, with particular attention paid to strengthened transparency, equity, clarity and consistency in pathogen-sharing practices globally, and to increase capacity worldwide for both the sequencing of pathogen genomes and the analysis of those genomes.

Chairperson, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to challenges in laboratory biosafety, resulting in the need to establish unparalleled levels of surge testing capacity as rapidly as possible, despite these challenges.

Zambia is currently facing a critical shortage of trained human resource and inadequate PPEs. In addition, most of our laboratory designs are not suitable for laboratory work, compounded by inadequately disseminated safety manuals and guidelines. For example, out of 30 laboratories assessed using the Strengthening Laboratory Biosafety Programs checklist: FY 2020, only 2 scored above 80%.

We have thus embarked on ensuring that all strategic documents are revised and updated, and ensure their implementation to enhance laboratory biosafety. As we recommit to the resolution of the 148th session in 2021 as resolution WHA58.29, we wish to call upon the Secretariat and other stakeholders for support.

Finally, Chairperson, we acknowledge the gains scored globally towards polio eradication and applaud the Secretariat, Member States and all stakeholders for their efforts in this fight.

The occurrences of Vaccine Derived polio virus type 2 within our Region, however, continue to serve as a reminder on the need to enhance surveillance and other interventions that have been key to the progress made thus far.

Chairperson, Zambia remains committed to the fight against polio and, even amidst the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to routine immunization, we have continued to conduct catch up immunization activities during the biannual Child Health Weeks, with deliberate polio mop up vaccinations in high risk districts in order to ensure sustained protection of our children from this disease.

I thank you.