



Republic of The Gambia
Ministry of Health
The Quadrangle
Banjul

SEVENTY-NINTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

REGIONAL STATEMENT

STATEMENT OF THE MINISTER, GENEVA 18-23 MAY 2026

Prepared by The Gambia, Mauritius Equatorial Guinea

Agenda Item: K, L, M & R	Protect Health & Power and Performance • K. Strengthening laboratory biological risk management (resolution WHA77.7 (2024)) • L. Pandemic Influenza Preparedness: sharing of influenza viruses and access to vaccines and other benefits (resolution WHA64.5 (2011)) • M. Smallpox eradication: destruction of variola virus stocks (resolution WHA60.1 (2007)) • R. Strategy for integrating gender analysis and actions
Documents	Document A79/26 and
Requested action	Note the reports and acknowledge the steps agreed on the global actions
Time limit	3 minutes

Honourable Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

The Gambia is honored to deliver this statement on behalf of the 47 member states of the African Region.

The WHO African Region welcomes deliberations under *Protect Health: Power and Performance*, recognizing the strong interlinkages across laboratory biosafety, pandemic preparedness, pathogen stewardship, and gender-responsive health systems. We reaffirm our commitment to collective action grounded in solidarity, equity, and scientific integrity, and commend WHO for advancing guidance, tools, and partnerships in these critical areas.

On **laboratory biological risk management**, the Region underscores the importance of safe, secure, and responsible laboratory systems to prevent biological incidents while enabling effective surveillance, diagnostics, and research. Persistent challenges—including infrastructure gaps, limited regulatory frameworks, workforce shortages, and insufficient financing—require sustained international support, predictable resources, and strengthened national ownership, in line with the One Health approach.

Regarding **Pandemic Influenza Preparedness**, the Region reiterates its strong commitment to virus sharing through the Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System. African countries continue to contribute to global public goods despite resource constraints. This must be matched by equitable, timely, and affordable access to vaccines, diagnostics, antivirals, and other benefits. We call for strengthened benefit-sharing arrangements, sustainable financing of the PIP Framework, and accelerated efforts to expand regional manufacturing capacity and system readiness.

On **smallpox eradication**, we recall Africa's pivotal role and reaffirm our principled support for the eventual destruction of all remaining variola virus stocks. Continued retention poses biosafety, biosecurity, and ethical concerns. Any further research must be strictly justified, time-bound, and subject to rigorous international oversight, with equitable access to resulting benefits for all Member States.

Finally, on **gender integration**, while progress is noted, persistent inequalities and data gaps continue to affect health outcomes. Strengthening national capacities, data systems, and accountability for gender-responsive approaches remains essential.

In conclusion, these priorities are mutually reinforcing pillars of resilient and equitable health systems. The African Region calls for enhanced global cooperation to ensure that no country is left behind.

Thank you.