14.1 COVID-19 Response

1. Chairperson, Botswana is pleased to deliver this report on behalf of the Africa Region Member States. We thank the Director General for the detailed and informative report on the COVID-19 Response. The Africa Region commend the WHO’s leadership and coordination role across all levels in the COVID-19 response. The WHO’s Health Emergency Programme which was established under the leadership of the Director-General Dr Tedros, has been a key milestone in this regard.

2. We appreciate the technical and operational Secretariat’s support missions and expansion of the hospital bed capacity, Infection Prevention and Control support, SARS-COV-2 laboratory testing capacity. The Region has utilised the tools available including the COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan, Partners Platform, and the various technical guiding documents.

3. We congratulate the Secretariat on the global collaborative effort on the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT Accelerator) which is a key initiative to promote equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, treatments, diagnostics and all other medical products. We look forward to an ongoing transparent and inclusive update on the successes of this initiative for the benefit of the Member States.

4. Chairperson, the Africa Region is concerned about the disruptions in the global supply chains particularly during the initial phase of the COVID-19 crisis, which significantly affected our response. We are however confident that the Secretariat in partnership with other UN agencies and philanthropic organisations will continue to ensure equitable allocation of critical items which include personal protective equipment, comprising medi-
cal masks, respirators, oxygen concentrators, pulse oximeters, ventilators and other essential biomedical items for clinical care particularly to low and middle income countries.

5. The Region notes with appreciation the WHO’s ambitious target for the distribution of new COVID-19 tools including the provision of two billion doses of vaccine to all countries by the end of 2021 and 245 million treatment courses and 500 million diagnostic tests to low-income and middle-income countries by mid-2021.

6. Chair, as reported by the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response there are great inequalities in the COVID-19 vaccines availability and roll-out among and between nations. The report indicates that our Region will be the last to receive enough vaccine coverage for public health impact which is deeply concerning. We therefore call for urgent global solidarity to prioritise investment in affordable and safe COVID-19 vaccines and equitable allocation based on the principle of fairness for public health impact.

7. Regarding the research and development (R&D) we thank the Secretariat for supporting several scientific studies on new diagnostics, vaccines and therapeutics. It is important for the WHO to continue to ensure representation of public health researchers and scientists from the Region in the WHO R&D multi-stakeholder forums, in order to share expertise, forge networks and partnerships.

8. We appreciate the support to assess Member States readiness to deploy new COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics effectively and efficiently as they become available.

9. Chairperson, the Africa Region commits to working with the Secretariat and Partners to assure readiness for vaccine introduction.

I thank you.