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## LESOTHO

### NEWSBRIEF- WHO LESOTHO CALLS FOR MEDIA ADVOCACY AFTER ESTABLISHMENT OF AFRICAN PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY FUND

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Dr. Jacob Mufunda, WHO Representative to Lesotho, briefing journalists on the African Public Health Emergency Fund, with Peter Phori, WHO Health Promotion Officer, and Mrs Mateboho, Ministry of Health Public Relations Officer.

On Wednesday, 1st August, WHO Lesotho Country Representative, Dr. Jacob Mufunda, undertook a press briefing session with the national media to inform them about the recent establishment of the African Public Health Emergency Fund (APHEF). He encouraged wide publicity and sustained advocacy in support of the implementation of the resolution. The purpose of the APHEF is to facilitate the mobilizing, managing and disbursing of additional resources from Member States for responding to public health emergencies in a most efficient and timely manner.

Dr. Mufunda was joined by Mrs. Mateboho, Public Relations Officer from the Ministry of Health and Peter Phori, WHO Health Promotion Officer. Members of the media in attendance included television, radio and newspapers. The national television station, Lesotho Television, filmed the press conference and aired it on the news that evening. Members from several radio stations including P.C FM, MoAfrika FM, Catholic Radio as well as the national radio station, Radio Lesotho, were present. Written media journalists from the Informative Newspaper, Lesotho Today, Friday Flyer and Business edge also attended.

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In his statement, Dr. Mufunda highlighted the significance of the resolution and its potential to contribute in saving lives in the early days of crisis situations, in particular when responses have not been taken to the next level.

In the question and answer session after the briefing, attending journalists were eager to learn more about the fund. Issues involving fund management, criteria for fund contributions, whether the funds could be used for non-health emergencies were among those discussed. Dr. Mufunda stressed that this fund is for health emergencies only as health is of optimal importance during an emergency. He described the fund as ‘money in the bank’ and how it will be immediately accessible should the country need it.

When asked about the importance of this fund to Lesotho and if he felt there was a need for it, Dr. Mufunda highlighted how in the last several years the country has gone through severe droughts and floodings and the fund may be very necessary if the country faces a similar emergency.

In closing the press conference, Mr. Phori thanked the journalists and also urged them; *“Let us inform and advocate the public, decision makers and all those who are in charge for translating the resolution into concrete action for the benefit of our country”*.



Member of the media asking questions during the press conference.

# Lesotho to benefit from African public health fund



WHO-health and promotion officer Peter Phori

By Matielane Makhele

MASERU - Following outbreaks and emergencies that hit African countries hard, resulting to the loss of many lives, the African Union (AU) heads of states have recently

established the African Public Health Emergency Fund (APHEF).

The fund is expected to help countries deal with epidemics and pandemics thereby saving lives and reducing poverty. According

to the health and promotion officer, Peter Phori, this fund is basically made for emergencies which might arise due to factors such as drought, floods as well as some disease outbreaks excluding the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

He said each country is expected to contribute a certain amount of money of which he said unless the country experience these kinds of emergencies, would not be able to use that account. One of the objectives of the introduction of this fund, which was outlined by the World Health organization regional director, Dr Luis Sambo, was to help member states to mobilize, manage and disburse additional resources so that they can respond rapidly and effectively to public health emergencies of national and international concerns. He said this fund was proposed by Dr Sambo, and was approved in the 60th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa held in 2010 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea.

Phori further indicated that the Republic of Gambia's president Dr. Yahya Jammeh in his address to the Heads of State and Government, reminded them last month during the launch of this fund that, public health emergencies remain a major concern for Africa, as they continue to shackle the continent's development. "President Jammeh pointed out that these countries do not have the requisite human, financial and material

resources to deal effectively and efficiently with public health emergencies. He said they often have to shift their attention beyond their boundaries for external assistance that sometimes arrive when much damage has already been done," explained Phori.

According to WHO statistics every day, millions of people living in the WHO African Region face threats to their health and livelihoods as a result of disease outbreaks, natural and manmade disasters. These incidents are often associated with a high number of deaths as well as destruction of health facilities. Natural disasters such as floods, cyclones and droughts displace communities making them vulnerable to diseases. In 2008 alone, eleven countries in West Africa, 9 countries in Southern Africa and at least four countries in the Nile valley recorded floods that displaced over half a million people with 160,000 in Mozambique alone.

Meanwhile, the health ministry's spokesperson Mateboho Moseboko said there are working hand in hand with the WHO-Lesotho in trying to identify challenges that might be classified as emergencies. She said Lesotho does not experience these kinds of incidents but it is sometimes affected by malnutrition. She said the ministry and WHO-Lesotho they are mandated to disseminate information about the fund to Basotho.