

REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA

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**STATEMENT BY HER EXCELLENCY AMBASSADOR MINATA SAMATÉ CESSOUMA,
COMMISSIONER FOR HEALTH, HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT, AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

Your Excellency Denis Sassou-Nguesso, President of the Republic of Congo,
Right Honourable Prime Minister and Members of Government of the Republic of Congo,
Honourable Gilbert Mokoki, Minister of Health and Population of the Republic of Congo,
Honourable Edwin Dikoloti, Minister of Health of the Republic of Botswana and Chairperson of the
Seventy-third session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa,
Honourable Ministers of the African Region and Heads of delegation;
Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization
Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa
Distinguished partners,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like to begin by expressing my deep gratitude to His Excellency the President of the Republic of Congo, and to the Government and people of Congo for the very warm welcome we have received since our arrival in the beautiful city of Brazzaville.

It is a great honour for me to take the floor at the opening of the Seventy-fourth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, on behalf of His Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, and on my own behalf.

This session is being held at a decisive time for Africa, which must choose the next WHO Regional Director for Africa, a leader who will have to amplify the mission of WHO to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we meet, it is worth noting that significant progress has been made in public health across Africa, but we also face unprecedented challenges that require immediate and concerted action on our part. The mpox outbreak affecting several of our Member States is a perfect example.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the vulnerabilities of our health care systems and the urgent need for robust health infrastructure, equitable access to health care and sustainable financing mechanisms.

The themes to be discussed at this session resonate deeply with our commitment to ensuring that every African has access to the health care they deserve. We must prioritize health services integration, improve our response to health emergencies and invest in health promotion and disease prevention strategies, in line with the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the African Health Strategy (2016–2030).

To that end, Member States, international organizations, partners and civil society need to foster collaboration to address the social determinants of health such as poverty, lack of access to quality education and health care and gender inequalities, which have a significant impact on health outcomes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we deliberate over the next few days, let us focus on the following key areas:

- **Health systems strengthening:** We need to advocate for greater investments in health infrastructure and human resources, ensuring that our health systems are resilient and able to respond to future health emergencies and crises. That is why I welcome the decision of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union to organize a summit in the last quarter of 2024 on health financing. I also applaud the operationalization of the African Medicines Agency and the African Humanitarian Agency, as well as the excellent work done by the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), under the leadership of its Director-General, Dr Jean Kaseya;
- **Universal health coverage:** It is imperative that we work towards universal health coverage, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of socioeconomic status, have access to essential health services;
- **Equity in health care:** We need to address disparities in access and health outcomes, particularly for marginalized communities, to ensure that no one is left behind; and
- **Collaboration and partnerships:** Stronger partnerships with international organizations, bilateral and multilateral partners, NGOs and the private sector will be crucial to mobilize the resources and expertise needed to improve health care systems in Africa.

Member States' commitment will be crucial if we are to implement these guidelines and achieve lasting improvements in the health and well-being of the people of Africa.

The African Union Commission is committed to working tirelessly with all partners and Member States to improve health governance, promote equity in health and support innovation in the health sector.

Together, we can build a future where health for all is a concrete reality, not a distant ideal.

**Your Excellency Mr President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to thank Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, for his support for the African continent and the African Union.

I would also like to pay tribute to an exceptional figure whose name resonates as a symbol of leadership and dedication to public health: Dr Matshidiso Moeti, the first woman to hold the post of WHO Regional Director for Africa. This is not only a historic achievement for WHO, but also a victory for the African continent and for all African women.

Dr Moeti has raised the level of collaboration with the African Union in implementing health policies on our continent. On the sidelines of the Regional Committee session, a memorandum of understanding will be signed by Dr Moeti and myself in my capacity as the African Union Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development. Her technical expertise and ability to forge solid partnerships were decisive in the progress achieved on the African continent in the field of health. Her appointment for a second term in 2019 was a testament to the confidence that African States placed in her.

Her legacy will continue to inspire future generations of public health leaders in Africa and beyond. I wish her every success in her future endeavours.

Thank you for your attention.