

REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA**ORIGINAL: ENGLISH**Seventy-fourth sessionBrazzaville, Republic of Congo, 26–30 August 2024**CLOSING REMARKS BY THE WHO REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR AFRICA**

Your Excellency Gilbert Mokoki, Chairperson of the Seventy-fourth session of the Regional Committee for Africa,

Honourable Ministers,

Heads of Delegation,

Partners,

Dear colleagues and friends,

I sincerely thank His Excellency President Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of Congo, for presiding over the opening ceremony at Palais des Congrès and for his strong personal leadership and commitment to health development.

We were all delighted that his Prime Minister and many senior government officials joined the Walk-the-Talk event at the start of RC74.

I thank you, Mr Gilbert Mokoki, the Minister of Health and Population of the Republic of Congo, for so ably chairing this Seventy-fourth session of our Regional Committee for Africa. Through you, I would like to sincerely thank the National Committee for the excellent arrangements that enabled us to have very productive deliberations.

Thank you to our two Vice-Chairpersons, the Honourable Ministers of Health of Liberia and Mauritania. I would also like to thank the ministers-rapporteurs, who worked in the background with my colleagues in the Secretariat, the same as the Committee on Credentials.

To all our Member States, Honourable Ministers, your delegations, partners, and non-State actors, please accept my deep gratitude for the rich and stimulating discussions during the plenary sessions, as well as the side events this week. Given our busy schedule, we sincerely apologise for making extra demands on your time.

I would like to thank those who made the extra effort to join us virtually through our livestream platforms. Thank you for having stayed with us throughout the meeting.

The discussions we have had, and the decisions will guide our work as we intensify our efforts to accelerate progress towards the SDG targets.

I sincerely appreciate your very positive comments on our collective achievements under “The Ten Years of the Transformation Agenda of WHO in the African Region” and recommendations for sustaining this positive change. The RD Nominee has indicated his intention to sustain it.

Honourable Ministers and Delegates,

What a wonderful commitment our Member States and partners demonstrated to the WHO Investment Round! Thank you very much! In all, we raised US\$ 45 million, for Member States, and US\$ 250 million, overall!

This will go a long way to ensuring flexible, predictable funding of WHO programmes, including for programmes that have traditionally been underfunded.

I congratulate the Regional Committee for nominating our next Regional Director, Dr Faustine Engelbert Ndugulile of Tanzania, following a very transparent election process. Dr Ndugulile and I will arrange a smooth transition and handover process in the coming weeks.

I am also grateful to the Regional Committee for the designation of Regional Director Emeritus, a title I expect to assume after my contract ends on 31 January 2025.

We had very productive discussions on responding to the mpox outbreak, a public health emergency of international concern. I applaud the countries most affected for the actions they are already taking to respond.

You commended the collaboration between WHO and Africa CDC in developing a continental response and preparedness plan for mpox. We have noted your recommendations, especially the following:

Enhance research on mpox, especially on its mutations;

Continue case reporting;

Accelerate the process of procuring vaccines.

We also stressed the efficacy of targeted vaccination and the use of other countermeasures, like community-based surveillance.

Our common goal is to end these different mpox outbreaks.

The importance of seizing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build an international rule-based system for equitable pandemic prevention, preparedness and response was emphasized. I encourage all our Member States to participate fully in this process.

I take this opportunity to remind all Member States about the INB-related interactive dialogues on articles 4 and 5 that will take place next week, on 3 September.

You made valuable recommendations to accelerate progress towards the SDG-health targets and universal health coverage. We expressed our desire to end polio in Africa and increase momentum to

reduce child and maternal mortality, address climate change, and local production of medicines, among others.

Multisectoral connections and raising resources from donors in support of national priorities and plans are critical for us to make the progress we want.

I do not intend to list your decisions or the regional strategies you have adopted.

I note the insistence on noncommunicable diseases. You have reminded us of the need to address other determinants of health. I was delighted that all our Member States engaged actively in these discussions.

Conflicts and political instability remain common occurrences in our Region, and these were named. We must be prepared and build capacity to minimize their impact on health.

A very special thank you to all those who worked so hard to prepare for this meeting. I thank the National Committee, our moderators, speakers, panellists, translators, and everyone who worked in the background to ensure our meeting was fruitful. I also thank those who helped us to produce the documents that guided our discussions.

This is my last Regional Committee as WHO Regional Director.

I thank our Member States, the Honourable Ministers, partners, and all the stakeholders who supported my work and ensured we had an impact at the country level and in communities.

I thank the Government of Botswana in a special way for the support it has given me during these ten years as Regional Director, and for the lifetime achievement award President Masisi bestowed on me at last year's Regional Committee.

I would like to thank all my WHO colleagues. My directors, our colleagues from headquarters, our country representatives, and all WHO colleagues who work behind the scenes.

I am sincerely grateful to each of you, my dear WHO colleagues. I am the face of the work you do daily in 47 countries and the WHO Regional Office. Thank you for supporting my work and helping me achieve a successful mandate. I wish you the very best in your careers and endeavours.

I was deeply touched—and, indeed, it was a well-kept secret—when some of you honoured me with recognitions and decorations during the Transformation Agenda special event. I am truly grateful for such a gesture.

I now invite the Honourable Gilbert Mokoki to receive a personalized gavel as a token of our appreciation.

Thank you all once again. I wish you all a safe trip home. I hope many of you will take the opportunity of the excursion organized by our host to see a bit more of the Congo before you depart the country.

I look forward to continuing to the end, and seeing Dr Ndugulile get off to a smooth start.

Thank you very much.