



REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA

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Cotonou, Republic of Benin, 3–7 November 2014

**STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND POPULATION
OF THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO AT THE OPENING OF THE SIXTY-FOURTH
SESSION OF THE WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA**

- Your Excellency the President of the Republic of Benin,
- The Director-General of WHO,
- Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,
- The WHO Regional Director for Africa,
- Representatives of International Organizations,
- Ladies and Gentlemen, All protocol respected,

This session opens at a peculiar time in view of the outbreak of Ebola virus disease (EVD). As you are aware, by 27 October this year, this deadly virus had already affected 13 703 people resulting in 4922 deaths this year with serious economic and social consequences for the affected countries.

These figures are, no doubt, an under-estimation given the weaknesses of our health systems. As a show of solidarity with countries affected by this horrible virus and in memory of its victims, I would kindly ask that we observe one minute of silence.

- Your Excellency, the President of the Republic,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

The pillars of EVD control have been repeatedly highlighted by international organizations and WHO. Despite the progress made in diagnosis through the development of rapid screening tests yet to be made available and the production of candidate vaccines including the one recently approved by SWISSMED at the *Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Vaudois*, prevention based on communication, information, training and hygiene remains the bedrock of the control effort. We cannot rejoice yet because the epidemic is far from being brought under control in the affected countries.

Therefore, the crisis alert level must be kept high in all the other countries in order to avoid importation of the virus.

Although the EVD epidemic is worrying, it must not divert our attention from other major issues that need to be addressed at this meeting, namely:

- Scaling up measures for achieving the MDGs;
- Validating the outlines of our post-2015 action plans based on sustainable development goals;

- Control of communicable diseases and noncommunicable diseases;
- Harmonizing our action on universal health coverage that remains indispensable for strengthening our health systems;
- Pursuing WHO reform.

- Ladies and Gentlemen,

This reform would be implemented by a new management team of the WHO Regional Office for Africa that must support our 47 Member States to improve the health of our populations.

Before we consider these matters, I would first of all like to pay a special tribute to Dr Luis Gomes Sambo, the outgoing Regional Director, for his immense and tireless work for our health systems. On your behalf and on my own behalf, I congratulate him for the heritage he is bequeathing to his successor and I respectfully commend the diverse forms of work he did at the helm of our common health institution over the last 10 years.

- Ladies and Gentlemen,

During our tenure as Chairman of the Sixty-third session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, we were able to appreciate the considerable professional and human qualities of Dr Luis Gomes Sambo.

He demonstrated willingness and talent to successfully address the major health challenges facing our Region.

As for our own performance, we leave that to your judgment. We humbly conducted our work in accordance with our mandate as prescribed and held ourselves in readiness for action whenever it became necessary. In this regard, we participated in various high-level meetings to resolve the health problems that still afflict our populations.

- Ladies and Gentlemen,

As our tenure comes to an end, we wish to express our gratitude to the Republic of Benin and its Government for accepting to host this session. At the same time, we wish our presumed successor, the Minister of Health of Benin, success in taking on and uplifting the mantle of disease control and improvement of the well-being of our populations. We would like to assure her in advance that we are in readiness to support her in this noble and exciting task.

On this note, I wish the Sixty-fourth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa great success.

Thank you for your kind attention.