

REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA

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Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, 26–30 August 2024

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR DENIS SASSOU N'GUESSO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC, HEAD OF STATE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE SEVENTY-FOURTH
SESSION OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR
AFRICA, 26–30 AUGUST 2024**

Honourable Ministers of Health of Member States of the World Health Organization African Region;
Director-General of the World Health Organization;
Regional Director of the World Health Organization;
Honourable Chairperson of the Seventy-third session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa;
Your Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic and Consular Missions;
Distinguished Representatives of international organizations,
Dear Delegates;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

My country, the Republic of Congo, which is honoured to host this impressive session of the World Health Organization Regional Committee for Africa, extends a warm welcome to you and wishes you a pleasant stay in Brazzaville.

Health is humankind's greatest asset, and since ancient times, people have made offerings and offered sacrifices to celebrate the gods and the dead, in the hope of receiving health in return.

Nowadays, these practices are common throughout the world, and libations are poured out to implore health from ancestors.

However, it is paradoxical that today, we sometimes worship alcohol – which, after all, is reputed to be harmful to health – when we drink a toast to "the health of our guests".

Disease vectors know no borders. They circulate easily, and prevention stands out as the most effective means of warding off disease through vaccines.

Prevention through vaccination, of course, but above all through observance of the best rules for good health, such as a healthy lifestyle, a balanced diet, regular exercise, etc....

Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen;

By 2050, Africa's population is expected to reach 2 billion, comprising mostly young people.

There is no doubt that such a demographic shift will be a major asset for the continent's development, through the availability of significant human capital.

Meanwhile, the growth of our population will also generate other, more demanding challenges in the area of health care, particularly in terms of delivery of adequate and quality care.

African countries are investing substantial financial resources in health care. Life-saving advances have been made in reducing maternal, newborn and infant mortality, and in combating preventable and communicable diseases.

However, notwithstanding the commendable progress achieved and the considerable efforts made by our countries to eradicate these scourges, Africa still faces a number of health threats.

Ongoing events include repeated outbreaks of the Ebola virus disease and mpox, recurrent cycles of meningitis, cholera and typhoid, and persistent outbreaks of malaria.

Hence, with the support of our development partners, whom we salute, we need to focus our actions on the most pressing health problems, under the leadership of WHO.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our hearty congratulations to the Director-General of the World Health Organization for his "triple billion" vision, and for the support he has accorded Africa in achieving the objectives of the African Union's Agenda 2063.

The Republic of Congo would like to assure you, Director-General, of its full support in this exciting mission that you are carrying out with professionalism and dedication.

Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

My country, which is committed to strengthening its preparedness and response to health emergencies and other crises, recently agreed on the strategic priorities of its cooperation with WHO for the period 2024–2027, effectively taking account of the needs of our populations.

A major thrust of that cooperation will be to support priority health care delivery through the revitalization of health districts.

Building on that option, I would like once again to call for a coalition in support of the initiative to establish the "International Primary Health Care Day", which was launched by my country in May 2024 in Geneva at the last World Health Assembly.

In that regard, the development of modern health care infrastructure in my country, with the ongoing construction of 13 state-of-the-art health facilities, namely 12 referral hospitals and a Military Teaching

Hospital, the supply of qualified personnel and the mobilization of funding to strengthen our health care system, remain our major areas of focus, as part of the 2022–2026 National Development Plan.

Similarly, we are devoting sustained attention to the introduction of universal health coverage in our country, in order to promote access of our populations to quality medical care, in a spirit of equity and solidarity.

In addition, free malaria treatment for children and pregnant women, free treatment for HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, free caesarean sections, free treatment for ectopic pregnancies, and free emergency care for babies born through caesarean section, are all part of the drive to significantly raise the health status of the most vulnerable segments of the population.

Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen;

To conclude, I would like to remind you of the international conference on afforestation and reforestation that was held in July 2024, as part of our efforts to combat climate change, which is a major threat to global health.

Water- and vector-borne diseases, respiratory infections, malnutrition, droughts and floods, which are accelerating under the impact of climate change, call for a vigorous response on our part.

The commitment of WHO to this noble cause for the survival of humanity, is a source of encouragement in our fight for the environment, and in particular for the preservation of tropical forest basins.

Nonetheless, wherever nature reestablishes and reasserts itself, infectious micro-organisms are certain to be found, including viruses, bacteria and parasites capable of causing emerging and re-emerging diseases in both humans and animals.

This calls for heightened vigilance to ensure sustained epidemiological surveillance and an urgent, effective response.

Allow me, finally, to express my gratitude and thanks to the World Health Organization for the honorary distinction awarded to me, which is a source of legitimate pride to the Congolese people.

For an Africa that is more confident of its operational capacities in the area of health; for an Africa that is better prepared to cope with diseases, and wishing you every success in your deliberations, I declare open the Seventy-fourth session of the World Health Organization Regional Committee for Africa.

I thank you.