



REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA

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**STATEMENT BY H.E. DR THOMAS BONI YAYI, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF BENIN, ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE SIXTY-
FOURTH SESSION OF THE WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA**

- Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr Margaret Chan;
- Heads of Institutions of the Republic,
- Ministers of Health and Heads of Delegation,
- Members of Government,
- WHO Regional Director for Africa,
- Chairman of the Sixty-third session of the Regional Committee for Africa,
- Excellencies the Heads of Diplomatic and Consular Missions and Representatives of International Organizations accredited to Benin,
- Technical and Financial Partners,
- Distinguished Delegates and Members of the Organizing Committee of the Sixty-fourth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa,
- Distinguished Guests,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

My country, Benin, is honoured to host the Sixty-fourth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa in the spirit of African hospitality.

On this occasion, on behalf of the Government and People of Benin, and on my own behalf, I have the pleasure to warmly welcome our distinguished guests.

Your presence here in Cotonou is in our view an evidence of your esteem for our country and your commitment to WHO, our common Organization, so that it can continue to address health challenges in accordance with the objectives set for it since its establishment in 1948.

- Director-General of WHO,

I am particularly delighted about your physical presence at this gathering. It attests to your determination and your unquestionable leadership to promote the well-being of the people of the world in general and of Africa in particular. You do your work with remarkable synergy and that has enhanced effectiveness in the definition of national health policies.

I also hail the presence among us of Dr Luis Gomes Sambo, WHO Regional Director for Africa who, during his tenure of office which is about to end, worked so tirelessly to address the health issues facing our dear continent.

- WHO, Director-General,
- The Regional Director,
- Distinguished Delegates,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

You would appreciate, as I do and as does the whole international community, the importance of this session of the WHO Regional Committee that opens against the backdrop of the ongoing Ebola virus disease epidemic and is wreaking so much havoc on our continent from the health, economic and social standpoints.

In fact, this terrible and unpredictable disease called Ebola has claimed over 5000 lives only a few months after it emerged in our subregion.

The Cotonou meeting therefore provides an ideal opportunity for a thorough discussion on this cruel disease as clearly set forth in this meeting's agenda.

There is urgent need to find the most effective means to eradicate the disease as quickly as possible. That is why we are already so delighted about the calibre of participants gathered here at this meeting which, under your enlightened leadership, Madam Director-General, should be able to pass appropriate resolutions to give back hope to the affected people and health care providers.

May I use this occasion to express, on behalf of the People of Benin, my deepest sympathy to the sister-countries affected by this terrible viral disease, and to the families of health care providers who lost their lives while saving those of Ebola patients.

- Director-General,

The World Health Organization, our global organization, has won many battles including the most unlikely ones. The legitimate hope of the entire world, particularly Africa, is that it will defeat this new common enemy, its occurrence and its tragedies so that, hopefully, it will soon fade away to the distant memory.

My country and indeed the entire African continent are aware of the commendable initiative that WHO has been taking without relent since the onset of the epidemic in our subregion.

Therefore, on behalf of my peers in Africa and on my own behalf, I would like to publicly pay a well-deserved tribute to you in your fight to eradicate, in collaboration with the international community, the terrible virus that is causing so much panic among humankind.

- Director-General,

On behalf of my dear colleagues in Africa and of the people of Benin, I would once again like to welcome you to Cotonou and I commend the leadership role you are playing at the helm of WHO to meet the global health challenges of the 21st century.

Without intending to abuse your high sense of modesty, I would still be failing in my duties if I did not testify that the fundamental reforms you have initiated at the helm of the Organization and have so skilfully spearheaded will forever be engraved in bold letters in the annals of humankind's struggle to improve the well-being of the peoples of all continents.

- Director-General,

- Regional Director,
- Distinguished Delegates,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

The role WHO plays to ensure the vitality of our health systems is now well-known. Notwithstanding the considerable efforts and resources expended in this role, it should be acknowledged that our dear continent still has to meet immense health challenges.

The challenges include issues relating to human resources for health, health infrastructure, organization and financing of health care, etc.

We will still and ever need to rely on our common organization to continue to fight all forms of diseases.

We have no other choice, considering the past record with proven results that have helped to at least halt, if not eradicate completely, major endemic diseases like tuberculosis, malaria, HIV/AIDS and neglected tropical diseases including Buruli ulcer.

The successes recorded in health in Africa in these past decades were achieved with the invaluable support of the Regional Office under the able leadership of Dr Luis Gomes SAMBO as well as members of his team.

- Mr Regional Director,
- My dear brother and friend,

On behalf of the Heads of State and Government of Africa, I would like to express to you our profound gratitude and that of the people whom you have served with so much devotion during your tenure of office.

You have made quality contribution towards improving Africa's health indicators. The many projects you initiated, in collaboration with the WHO headquarters in Geneva, give Africa renewed and increasing hope for universal health coverage, which has so far remained only a dream.

- Honourable Ministers of Health,
- Heads of Delegation,

I would now like to address you and commend you for the initiatives and actions that you have embarked upon in your respective countries to improve the health status of your peoples.

Although our different States signed up to the Millennium Development Goals and have developed and implemented policies and strategies to achieve them, life expectancy remains low in most of our countries and maternal and child mortality is still a major challenge.

The tragic effects of the Ebola virus disease outbreak have shown that we need to further strengthen our various health systems that are still weak.

We should, therefore, seriously review our health systems in order to make them more effective in providing appropriate responses to the epidemics that are wreaking such havoc on our continent.

The dwindling of both internal and external resources as a result of the economic, monetary and financial crises should further remind us of our obligation to uphold good governance, reporting and accountability.

It is, therefore, important that I, once again, draw attention to the need for south-south cooperation in health, as is already being done in many of the countries represented here; in fact it should be intensified so that, with the support of our international partners, we can effectively address our health challenges.

Furthermore, our countries should endeavour to create the necessary conditions for developing a rationalized traditional medicine to complement modern medicine in improving the well-being of our populations.

Likewise, public-private partnership that is becoming increasingly dynamic on our continent should, more than ever, play a key role in resolving the health problems of our hard-working populations.

Finally, I would like to entreat you to bear in mind the continuing changes in our world, notably climate change and its attendant emerging diseases as well as some noncommunicable diseases that are no longer the preserve of developed countries.

- Madam Director-General,
- Distinguished Delegates,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is no secret that health is the bedrock of development. Among the major challenges facing our countries, maternal and child health must be a central theme in our discussions.

In that regard, I would like to commend here the initiatives taken by our partners on this subject notably the Campaign for Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA) and many others, because they hold encouraging prospects for Africa.

As we strive to liberate our people from extreme poverty we obviously need to adopt the systemic approach to health management with a view to improving management of the health of our people.

- Madam Director-General,
- The Regional Director,
- Distinguished Delegates,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thirty years ago, our late compatriot, Dr Alfred Comlan Quenum, passed away. During his tenure of office as WHO Regional Director for Africa, this great son of Benin gave the best of himself for the health development of African countries. Permit me to evoke his memory at this gathering and to pay him a befitting tribute.

Again, I would be failing in my duties if I did not mention the specificity of this Cotonou meeting at which, among other things, a new Director will be elected to head the WHO African Region. I would like to wish all the candidates the best of luck and to encourage the candidate who will be elected to succeed my dear friend, Luis Gomes Sambo, to endeavour, just like Dr Sambo and all

his predecessors did, to consolidate the precious achievements and, with determination and creativity, strive to meet the expectations of the African peoples.

I wish you every success in your deliberations and on this note of great hope and expectation, I declare open, today, Monday, 3 November 2014, the Sixty-fourth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa.

Long Live the World Health Organization!

Long Live International Cooperation!

Long Live African Integration at the Service of Health Development!

May GOD bless your deliberations!

I thank you.