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**OPENING SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR MULATU TESHOME,
PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA**

Dr Margaret Chan Director-General of the World Health Organization,
Honorable Ministers of Health of Member States of the African Region,
Honorable Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I'm delighted to have been invited to speak at this annual gathering of the World Health Organization's Sixty-sixth session of the Regional Committee Meeting of Africa.

From the outset let me say that it also gives me a pleasure to acknowledge the remarkable achievements in our African continent in regards to improving the health status of our people. Over the past two decades, we have made significant progress, both in the saving of millions of lives and also in improving the quality of the lives of our people. We should be proud of our achievements.

While we should celebrate our accomplishments in significantly increasing the life expectancy of our citizenry and considerably decreasing maternal and child mortalities, infections of TB, HIV/AIDS and malaria – we should not remain complacent — it is imperative that we continually retool, remain committed and set our goals for higher achievements.

It is also with gratitude and thankfulness that I want to take this opportunity to salute our communities, for owning and making of their good health; policy makers, for setting transformative agendas; health sector staff, for their untiring implementation; national and international partners, for their committed and sustained support; and the private sector, for their partnership.

Thank you all!

I'd also like to remind you that, due to its direct and indirect impact, health is one of the important determinants of the incidence of poverty. As good health plays a substantial role and is a driver of our economic growth and development, as leaders, we need to acknowledge the instrumental and intrinsic value of good health and give it the necessary attention.

Honorable Guests Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the coming decades, Africa's demographic shifts will be bringing significant challenges to the development of our health sectors. Africa is the only continent that is expected to almost double in population size by 2020, from over 1 billion to 2.7 billion. Such increase is expected to result in significant bulge both in youth and aging populations, exerting pressure in our health systems.

Also, in the coming decades, increasingly, our continent will be challenged by a triple burden of communicable and noncommunicable diseases, including injuries. For example, noncommunicable chronic diseases are expected to account for almost half deaths in Africa and are expected to overtake communicable diseases as the most common cause of death.

Therefore, we have to stay vigilant and prepared to address both current and emerging health threats – let us not lose sight that our present preparedness is a guaranteed investment for tomorrow.

Of course, daunting challenges will still be lurking ahead of us, epidemics such as Ebola will not be a one-time occurrence. We have to be vigilant and be ready to address impending threats by strengthening our health systems and collaborations in tackling these borderless threats, otherwise, the consequences will be dire. To this end, we have to take lesson from history, learn from our experiences and be ready for the future.

In the post-Millennium Development Goals agenda it is also necessary that we sustain the gains made thus far and look to the new Sustainable Development Goals as the beginning of new era to renew our commit, and not only develop, but transform our health sector. We must also focus on equity in the use of health services and health outcomes. No one should be left behind.

Honorable participants

I am confident in this gathering of Health Ministers of the African region your deliberation will bring about policy decisions which will positively impact the lives of millions of lives in our continent. Therefore, your policy directions should lend themselves to be actionable.

Because, actions speak louder than words and we must deliver on our promises, as the expression goes we must “walk the walk” – which is a moral imperative.

Now, I would like to ask African Ministers of Health to extend your support to the candidacy of Dr Tedros Adhanom as Director General Director of WHO, which has been overwhelmingly endorsed by the African Union. Dr Tedros brings to the table and impressive credential and experience with a vision and experience to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the World Health Organization to tackle existing and emerging health threats.

Finally, I wish you a productive meeting and enjoyable stay in Addis Ababa, and I declare the Sixty-sixth session of the Regional Committee meeting of WHO African Region officially open.

Thank you.