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**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCEY, MR ANDRE MAMA FOU DA,  
MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH OF CAMEROON,  
CHAIRMAN OF THE FIFTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE**

Honorable Ministers of Health of Member States of the WHO African Region,  
African Union Commissioner for Social Affairs,  
WHO Director-General,  
WHO Regional Director for Africa,  
Excellences and Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Distinguished Representatives of International Organizations,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege and a pleasant duty for me to take the floor today, in my capacity as Chairman of the Fifty-eighth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, on the occasion of the Fifty-ninth Session of the Committee, being hosted by Kigali, capital of a thousand hills, resolutely geared towards modernity.

Permit me, first and foremost, to express profound and sincere gratitude to His Excellency Mr Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, for having done us the great honour of chairing personally the official opening ceremony of the present session of the Regional Committee. We also thank the Government, the various local authorities and the People of Rwanda for the warm welcome and the hospitality they have given us since our arrival in this beautiful country, land of meeting, replete with history.

Last but not least, I would like to hail the so heartening presence, in our midst, of the WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan and distinguished representatives of the international organizations for the friendship they have shown to us by making the time to participate in this gathering despite their numerous and pressing occupations.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Our deliberations start at a time when our Region, after being spared for long, now has to contend with an unprecedented spread of influenza A (H1N1) 2009 which is currently rife in almost all Member States, demanding the establishment, without delay, of a joint response strategy.

I deem it opportune to pay tribute to WHO for its precious technical support and for the quality and promptitude of its contribution that have enabled us to strengthen our intervention capacity at this period of health crisis.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

This major crisis I have just referred to and deserving all our attention should not make us overlook the other equally important health challenges facing our continent and seriously undermining our development efforts. These challenges include the HIV/AIDS pandemic, tuberculosis, malaria and other communicable diseases, and maternal and child mortality that is taking so heavy a toll on women and children.

As you may know, the health situation of our Region remains worrying, though not desperate. With the help of our technical and financial partners, we will continue, with determination, to fight disease and, I am sure, we shall prevail.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would now like to give highlights of what we have been able to achieve during my term, in the past twelve months, in moving forward our joint programme of improving the health of our populations.

As you know, the year 2008 witnessed appreciable development of strategic tools for Primary Health Care revitalization, health research, and health and environment. In this context, the conferences organized in Ouagadougou, Algiers and Libreville have been landmarks confirming, once again, the determination of our Region to find appropriate solutions to its health problems.

In this regard, I note with satisfaction that the 2008 Annual Report of the Regional Director rightly states that substantial progress was made in 2008 towards achieving expected results. We owe this level of performance primarily to the personal leadership of Dr Luis Gomes Sambo to whom I should say, "Thank you".

Furthermore, the level of participation of our Region in the last World Health Assembly is, in my opinion, another legitimate cause for satisfaction. In effect, through coordination of our Region, we were able to build consensus on the principle of enhanced collaboration between the Regional Office and the African Group at the United Nations office with a view to ensuring cohesion in our choices with the policy decisions taken at the African Union, on the one hand, and ensuring greater visibility of our Region in the World Health Assembly, on the other.

I would therefore like to express unreserved gratitude to all the actors such as the ministers of health, heads of delegation, the African Union Ambassador accredited to the United Nations office in Geneva, the Coordinator of the African Group and the WHO Regional Director for Africa for the high sense of collaboration and consensus.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

The health challenges remain immense in our Region which still has a relatively long way to go and many hurdles to clear before achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Even so, it is heartening to note that we know what our problems are, in particular the weakness of our health systems, the human resources crisis, the inadequacy of financial resources, the limited access to medicines, inadequate harnessing of the knowledge generated from research and the insufficient community participation. We must therefore endeavour to devise appropriate strategies and build the synergies likely to enable us to reap more benefits from best practices. Now more than ever, the stakes in regard to health have become global, and the position of the WHO Regional Office must be further consolidated as a matter of urgency to enable it to accomplish, more conveniently, the missions that have been assigned to it.

Before ending my address, I would like, on behalf of my country, Cameroon, to express heartfelt gratitude to members of the bureau, ministers of health and the Secretariat for the support and frank collaboration they gave to me throughout the period of my term. I wish this session of the Regional Committee full success in its deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.