**TIME LINE**

**SUNDAY, 21 August:**

- 12:30-13:30 The Ethiopian Experience with Emergency Medical Services and the Health Development Army
- 19:30 Stop TB: Meeting of Ministers of Lake Chad countries and Central African Republic

**MONDAY, 22 August:**

- 13:30-14:30 The GAVI Alliance
- 18:00-19:30 Experience of China on the Universal Health Coverage and updates on China’s collaboration with Africa

**TUESDAY, 23 August:**

- 11:00 Closure of the RC66 – 11:00

**CURRENCY AND BANKING**

The local currency is the Ethiopian Birr. All local banks provide currency exchange services with an exchange rate that is uniform. Please note that it is illegal to exchange your currency on the black market – only deal with official banks. All major hotels have FOREX services.

ATMs are widely available in hotels, on the UNECA compound and around the city. VISA cards are widely accepted, and some ATMs now accept MasterCard as well. Almost all transactions are cash-based, so please plan accordingly.

**WATER**

The official opening ceremony of the 66th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa was held at the Economic Commission for Africa Conference Centre in Addis Ababa (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia) on 19th August 2016.

The meeting was officially opened by His Excellency the President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Dr. Mulatu Teshome in the presence of Ethiopian Minister of Health Dr Ketete-birhan Admasu Birhana; the Director General of WHO, Dr. Margaret Chan; the President of the 65th Session of the Regional Committee and Chadian Minister of Public Health, Dr. Assane Ngueadoum and the WHO Regional Director for Africa, Dr. Mathisdo Moeti and delegations from the 47 Member States of the WHO African Region and partners.

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In his opening address, he praised African governments and WHO for the significant results achieved in the health sector. “Over the past two decades, we have made significant achievements that have helped save millions of lives and improved the quality of life of our people. We should be proud of these results,” he said.

The President also called for vigilance and caution. “We must not be complacent. It is imperative that we continue to equip ourselves to remain engaged and to set goals to reach higher levels of achievement,” he added.

His Excellency Dr. Mulatu Teshome, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

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The special sessions and plenary debates focused on two main themes:

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2. The global challenge of non-communicable diseases

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In her last official address to the WHO Regional Committee for Africa the WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan gave three pieces of advice to the African Health Ministers and other delegates attending the 66th session of the WHO Regional Committee. These can contribute to the advancement of the health agenda in Member States. First, Dr Chan advised delegates to always be patient. “Take your cue from Africa’s 2063 agenda, which adopts a very long-term view.” She added that donors want quick results, “but it takes time to build well-functioning health systems, to develop pharmaceutical manufacturing capacity, and to implement the business plan for the African Medicines Agency”.

Secondly, she advised delegates to understand that changes that contribute to economic growth or follow in its wake can introduce new threats to health. Economic benefits, she said, do not offset detrimental impacts.

Thirdly Dr Chan advised delegates to stay optimistic. “The future of Africa depends on its people, and not on commodity prices or oil and mineral reserves. Put your people first. Take good care of their health. And set their talents free,” she said.

Earlier, Dr Chan informed delegates that the African Health Transformation Programme championed by the regional office should capitalize on a number of encouraging trends to transform the future of health on the continent. These include birth of a solid middle class, a vibrant and innovating younger generation, the ubiquitous availability of mobile phones and a dramatic increase in the use of social media.

According to Dr Chan, although Africa still has “the longest distance” to catch with the rest of the world, so much has been achieved since 2007 when she became Director-General. The achievements are proof of what can be achieved in resource-constrained settings. “They provide reason for optimism as the world moves in the areas of sustainable development”, she said.

Dr Chan informed delegates that poverty is the prominent factor that hinders health development in the region. It undermines the health of populations and cripples the performance of health systems. Fortunately Dr Chan said “the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) fundamentally address the root causes of poverty”.

Or Chan assured delegates that a well-functioning health system is the best defence against emerging and re-emerging disease. She added that in the SDG era, universal health coverage is good platform for fair and inclusive health development and increased global health security.

THE AFRICAN REGION MAKES SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS IN HEALTH WITH SUPPORT FROM THE WHO SECRETARIAT

The Regional Director presented the report on the work of WHO in the African Region for the period October 2015 to June 2016. The report outlines significant achievements made on the development of health services in Member States with support of the secretariat. Highlights of the report include the successful interruption of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) transmission in West Africa with rapid control of subsequent flare-ups in Guinea and Liberia.

According to the report, the region continues to improve health security with particular focus on preparedness and swift response to outbreaks of diseases. For the current yellow fever outbreak, 129 international experts have been deployed and 14 million doses of yellow fever vaccines provided to tackle the yellow fever epidemics in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda. USD 1.6 million was disbursed from WHO’s Contingency Fund for Emergencies and the African Public Health Emergency Fund to support response efforts against the yellow fever outbreaks. The Zika Virus outbreak in Cabo Verde and Guinea Bissau were controlled.

The report indicated a number of “FIRSTS” within this period. They include the first ever ministerial conference on immunization in Africa jointly organized with the African Union Commission in February 2016. The conference adopted a declaration affirming universal access to Immunization as a cornerstone for health and development in Africa.

Another FIRST mentioned in the report is the development of policy guidance and a legislative framework on the protection of intellectual property rights, traditional medical knowledge and access to biological resources. In addition, the first African National Health Research System (NHRS) Barometer that helps countries monitor their NHRS performance was developed in the African Region. The development of a comprehensive public health emergency risk profiling and mapping for the 47 Member States in the Region is also reported as another “FIRST”.

In April/May 2016, all the Member States in the Region completed the global switch from bi-valent Oral Polio Vaccine (bOPV) to bi-valent Oral Polio Vaccine (tOPV) on time. The switch eliminates the risk of paralytic from vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 contained in tOPV. The report also provides progress on reducing childhood illness and mortality and on polio eradication in the region. However, the recently identified polio cases in Northern Nigeria which are quickly being responded to, reinforce the need for continued vigilance and preparedness.

The report describes the achievements made on communicable and non-communicable diseases, inter-sectoral action and on strategic partnerships for health. It also mentions the establishment of the Expanded Special Project for Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (ESPEN) to support countries to tackle NTDs amenable to preventative chemotherapy that replaced the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC) that was closed in December 2015. ESPEN will work on lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis, soil-transmitted helminthiasis and trachoma.

Overall, the report demonstrates how WHO’s work touches people’s everyday lives for better health and wellbeing. It also proposed the way forward for WHO’s work with Member States and partners to achieve the best possible health outcomes for people of the Region.