

# **LAUNCH OF THE COMMISSION ON WOMEN'S HEALTH IN THE AFRICAN REGION**

**MONROVIA, LIBERIA  
14 APRIL 2010**

## **JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMISSION**

Despite the global and regional efforts to improve women's health, complications and mortality during pregnancy and childbirth remain a challenge in the African Region. In addition, gender inequity, poverty, weak economic capacity, low social status, sexual and gender-based violence including female genital mutilation, low levels of female education, neglect, discriminatory nutritional practices, sociocultural constraints, difficult access to economic empowerment, inadequate health care, are all factors contributing to ill-health among women. The fact that women are disadvantaged from the social, economic and political standpoints often creates difficulty for them in protecting and promoting their physical, emotional and mental health and hamper their effective use of health information and services. This is a breach of human rights and a barrier to broader social development.

On average, one out of every 26 women is at risk of dying during childbirth in sub-Saharan Africa compared to 1 woman in every 7300 in developed countries. Maternal mortality, estimated at 900 per 100 000 live births in sub-Saharan Africa, remains the highest worldwide.

Against this background, the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, at its Fifty-eighth session in 2008, adopted Resolution AFR/RC58/R1 requesting the Regional Director to establish a Commission on Women's Health in the African Region.

Implementing this resolution, the Regional Director, Dr Luis Gomes Sambo, set up an 18-member multidisciplinary Commission comprising leaders, high-level political personalities including parliamentarians, a representative of the African Union, as well as sociologists, economists, epidemiologists, public health physicians, researchers and obstetrician-gynaecologists.

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE COMMISSION**

The general objective of the Commission is to generate evidence on the key factors influencing the current health status of women in countries of sub-Saharan Africa and recommend appropriate action in the political, socioeconomic, cultural and health systems spheres in order to improve women's health and particularly reduce the unacceptable level of maternal mortality in sub-Saharan Africa.

## **THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMISSION**

- Produce a report on the political, economic, sociocultural and other factors influencing the current health status of women and the importance of women's health for the socioeconomic development of Member States.

- Use the key recommendations of the report to advocate for improvement of women's health and availability of increased resources for the implementation of international conventions and instruments on women's health and development adopted by countries.
- Use the report as a tool of advocacy for placing women's health issues high on the political agenda of Member States and for galvanizing actions of Member States and partners for improvement of women's health.

### **LAUNCHING ACTIVITIES ON 14 APRIL 2010**

The President of the Republic of Liberia, H.E. Mrs Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who is also the Honorary President of the Commission, will officially launch the Commission at the City Hall, Monrovia, on 14 April 2010. According to the programme of the event, the main speakers at the launching ceremony will include Dr Richard Sezibera, Minister of Health of Rwanda who is the current Chairman of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa bringing together ministers of health of countries of the African Region; a Special representative of the UN Secretary-General, Mrs Ellen Loj; the WHO Regional Director for Africa, Dr Luis Gomes Sambo; and the President of the Republic of Liberia, H.E. Mrs Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Participants in the launching ceremony will include Cabinet Ministers of the Government of the Republic of Liberia, Heads of Diplomatic Missions accredited in Liberia, UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral organizations. Other participants in the launching ceremony are the members and the secretariat of the Commission.

The launching ceremony will be immediately followed by a cocktail to be hosted by Dr Luis Gomes Sambo.