

## **Request by Non-State Actors to Submit a Written Statement at the Virtual Session of the Seventieth Regional Committee for Africa**

Non-state Actors that have registered to participate in the virtual session of the Seventieth Regional Committee for Africa and wish to make a written statement must submit a request to the Secretariat not later than two weeks before the start date of the meeting. The statements should be made available no later than one week for posting on the website.

The statement is to be delivered in written form only and should not be longer than 600 words. The statement should focus on technical issues and should be directly relevant to both the agenda item and to the document prepared for the item. The statement should not raise issues of political nature that are unrelated to the agenda item and should not contain any inappropriate or offensive reference to Member States. While there should not be reference to any individual Member States, or areas of Member States, it is recalled that nomenclature must follow that of the United Nations.

The Chair of the Regional Committee decides whether to accept the statement in light of its relevance to the discussion, the respect of the word limits and the compliance with the rules set above.

Accepted statements are posted on the website of the WHO Regional Office for Africa for a limited time period as determined by the Secretariat and will not be retained thereafter.

**Name and acronym of the accredited NSA** (in English, French or Portuguese):

**World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (WFSA)**

**Date and title of the meeting:**

25 August 2020 - The 70<sup>th</sup> WHO Regional Committee for Africa.

**Agenda item (number, title):**

5. Special event on the COVID-19 response in the WHO African Region

**Statement**

**The essential role of anaesthesiologists in the COVID-19 response**

The World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (WFSA) is the largest global anaesthetic network, representing 100,000's of anaesthesiologists in 137 countries, nearly a third of which are from the Africa region. We work with the WHO and other organisations to achieve universal access to safe anaesthesia.

The importance of access to safe anaesthesia as part of a well-functioning health system is widely accepted as per WHA Resolution 68.15 on 'Strengthening Emergency and Essential Surgical Care and Anaesthesia as a component of Universal Health Coverage'.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, anaesthesiologists have played a pivotal frontline and leadership role in emergency departments, operating rooms, and intensive care units saving patients' lives across the region. Anaesthesiologists are medical specialists, with expertise in the perioperative care of surgical patients, resuscitation, pain medicine and intensive care. This expertise has been vital in the area of oxygen therapy including patient ventilation. Their knowledge and adaptability has been critical to continuing to provide services in the face of the inconsistent or prohibitively expensive oxygen supplies that many countries are faced with.

Anaesthesiologists, together with other health workers, are the most important resource we have. Not only in the fight against COVID but also the other essential care that hospitals and health centres provide. We must ensure they are protected, supported and have the resources they need to do their jobs protecting populations.

No health system can function without a sufficient number of healthy and competent health workers. Therefore, WHO AFRO member states must ensure that for current and future pandemics, health workers have sufficient provision of disease appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and other tools to prevent them from becoming sick and unable to treat their patients. Health workers wellbeing must be prioritised. This includes regulating working hours, rest breaks and other measures to create a supportive environment to counteract ill-health and burnout.

This region's ability to effectively respond to the increased strain on its health care systems is further hamstrung by an on-going lack of skilled and appropriately trained anaesthesia providers.

The WFSA's Global Anaesthesia Workforce Survey shows that Africa has a physician anaesthesia provider density of just 0.44 per 100,000 population, far below the WHO recommended interim target of 5 per 100,000. In response, WFSA together with its partners, have developed a series of quality training and education programmes for physicians and non-physician providers alike.

For WHO Africa Region member states to meet the WHO recommended workforce targets, especially in anticipation of the next pandemic, there is an urgent need to develop and implement, national policy and financing frameworks that will sustainably grow and support vital anaesthesia services.

WFSA and its members work with national governments and others to develop National Surgical, Obstetric and Anaesthesia Plans (NSOAP) incorporating the WHO-WFSA international standards for safe practice of anaesthesia. These coordinated health plans provide a framework for governments to mitigate and sustainably address the health challenges posed by the COVID pandemic.

The WFSA calls on WHO AFRO member states and stakeholders to:

- Protect our most valuable resource, frontline health workers, by providing a safe working environment, including appropriate PPE.
- Develop, integrate and fund National Surgery, Obstetrics and Anaesthesia Plans (NSOAP) within national health policy and planning frameworks.
- Address chronic workforce deficiencies in anaesthesia and intensive care through the scale- up of training and continued medical education.
- Provide and maintain essential equipment for, anaesthesia resuscitation and intensive care, including the provision of affordable and consistent supply of oxygen therapy.

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**Date:** 19/08/2020