

71st Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa

Author: International Federation of Medical Students' Association (IFMSA)

Agenda item: Special Event on the COVID-19 Response in the African Region

Statement:

Meaningful youth participation in the region's COVID-19 response

Honorable Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates,

The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations represents over 1.3 million medical students from over 130 countries worldwide. IFMSA is represented by 30 countries in the African region.

We, as future health leaders, would like to highly commend WHO AFRO under the leadership of Dr. Moeti for its crucial role in managing the Coronavirus pandemic on the continent despite all the criticisms.

The continent is currently facing the 3rd wave of COVID-19 and as Dr. Moeti said "the third wave is gathering speed, spreading faster, hitting harder...it threatens to be the worst yet in Africa". We believe that these are the most crucial times for member states, non-state actors and the UN system to come together to urgently address such a large problem in a coherent and effective manner.

African countries have a proportionally large youth cohort, with 19 of the 20 youngest countries in the world belonging to the region. Youth are the backbone of the future and the new leaders of tomorrow. Through active participation, youth are empowered to play a critical role in their own development and that of their communities. Africa's young and growing population presents many opportunities and we would like to emphasize the importance of meaningful youth engagement in the region's response to COVID-19, including in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies.

Various solutions and innovations are being proposed by youth across the continent to fight the coronavirus. It is time for youth to be considered as full actors and privileged partners in the response to Covid-19 in their countries.

IFMSA calls upon member states to :

- Engage youth in mechanisms that amplify their voices during the pandemic by reaching out to other youth.
- Engage youth in health promotion initiatives and health services
- Ensure that youth can actively take part in decision-making bodies that lead the response to COVID-19 at the national and regional levels

We are not only the future, we are here now, ready to serve.

Thank you.