



International Atomic Energy Agency

IAEA statement to the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, 22-26 August 2022

Honourable Ministers,

Dear Chair,

Distinguished Delegates,

The IAEA works in collaboration with Member States in Africa, and around the world, to build their capacities to use nuclear science and technology for everything from boosting crops, to addressing diseases like cancer and COVID-19. We are committed to assisting African Member States to achieve the Africa they want and to supporting the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Distinguished Delegates,

Cancer is a global crisis hitting low- and middle-income countries particularly hard. Many of them lack even a single radiotherapy machine.

In Africa, over 700,000 people died of cancer in 2020. Cancer cases will further increase as Africa's population grows and economic progress raises life expectancy.

Cancer in Africa is a priority health issue, particularly cervical cancer - the leading cause of cancer death among women. Radiotherapy (including brachytherapy) is the main treatment for advanced cervical cancer. However, it remains unavailable for most women in African countries.

The IAEA supports countries to improve access to nuclear medicine, radiotherapy, and dosimetry services. With key partners such as the World Health Organization and the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the IAEA works to integrate these services into comprehensive cancer control plans. In 2021 and to date, the IAEA and partners conducted cancer control assessments (imPACT Reviews) to the Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali and Senegal. In addition, work is ongoing with Benin, Botswana, Burundi, CAR, Chad, Kenya, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Zambia, and Zimbabwe to develop their national cancer control plans.

The IAEA's Rays of Hope initiative, launched on the margins of this year's African Union Summit, by the IAEA's Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi, together with Senegal's President Macky Sall and with the support of leaders including Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, steps up the global response. It galvanizes all stakeholders in assisting countries in procuring the equipment and knowledge they need, particularly in nuclear medicine.

With the generous support of donor countries such as France, Japan, Monaco, Sweden, and the United States, the private sector and international financial institutions, Rays of Hope supports countries in the establishment and expansion of radiotherapy services, including brachytherapy, with a particular focus on more than 20 IAEA Member States that completely lack facilities for radiation treatment, most of which are in Africa.

Since its launch, 20 African Member States (including Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, and Zambia) expressed their interest in the initiative, some of them have already benefited from education and training in radiation medicine and radiation safety and security, as well as the procurement of equipment. Through Rays of Hope we provided renewed impetus to support African Member States in addressing the cancer burden in a holistic approach through the transfer of technology and resource mobilization.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Africa is also facing a double burden of malnutrition. Most African countries have more than one third of children below five years of age stunted due to multiple factors, primarily due to poor infant feeding practices, low-quality diet and health care. On the other hand, African dietary patterns have shifted to more energy-dense food while the rate of obesity is also on the rise, contributing to an increase of diet-related non-communicable diseases.

The IAEA supports African countries in combatting malnutrition. Stable isotope techniques (non-radioactive) generate accurate data that provide evidence for improving nutrition interventions and programmes. Through these techniques, several African countries have the capacity to assess breastfeeding practices, micronutrient absorption from foods, the link between acute malnutrition and later diseases, and to understand the evolution of childhood obesity.

We will remain WHO's committed partner in its noble mission of promoting and improving healthcare in Africa, and looking forward to working with other partner organizations to support African countries in meeting their socio-economic development priorities by 2030 and beyond.