



REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Seventieth Session

Virtual session, 25 August 2020

**OPENING REMARKS BY DR MATSHIDISO MOETI,
WHO REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR AFRICA**

Honourable Minister of Health, Population, and Women's Promotion and Integration in Development of the Republic of Congo, and Chairperson of the Sixty-ninth session of the Regional Committee for Africa, Mrs Jacqueline Lydia Mikolo,

Honourable Ministers of Health and Heads of Delegation,

WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros,

Your Excellency, African Union Commissioner for Social Affairs, Amira Elfadil,

Dear colleagues from UN agencies and other partner organizations,

Distinguished guests and members of the media,

Ladies and gentlemen:

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this Seventieth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa.

Were it not for COVID-19, we would be sitting together in Lomé, and I would like to thank the Honourable Minister of Health and Public Hygiene of the Republic of Togo, Professor Mijiyawa Moustafa, and the Government of Togo, for the preparatory work done in anticipation of hosting this session. I look forward to when we will next be able to meet in Lomé.

The world has changed in the past eight months, and I would like to commend you, Honourable Ministers, and through you to appreciate the leadership of Heads of State, and the fortitude of communities, for the strong and sustained response to this pandemic.

Countries in the Region have significant experience in dealing with numerous and sometimes widespread epidemics, and later today we will celebrate the historic achievement of kicking out one such threat, with the certification of regional eradication of wild poliovirus. I hope this will motivate us all as we continue in the fight against COVID-19.

The coronavirus pandemic has proven once again, the importance of investing in health systems, enhancing equitable access to care, improving readiness to prevent and control outbreaks, and enabling communities to play their role in realizing better health.

At WHO, we are providing policy and technical guidance to support the response to COVID-19, including through our WHO representatives and their teams in every Member State in the Region. More than 100 000 health workers have been trained in case management and infection prevention and control, and millions of essential supplies have been shipped and replenished.

We believe that the concerted actions of countries, with support from WHO and other partners, have averted the serious catastrophe foretold in early projections on how this virus could spread.

Now as countries open up, increased vigilance is required, with public health capacities in every community and engaged and enabled individuals doing their best to protect themselves and others.

The importance of equity and the social determinants of health have been highlighted in recent months and must be the principles that guide our strategies and actions to have the greatest impact, not only on COVID-19, but also on other health issues.

This time last year we set ourselves a focus on contributing to the global triple billion targets of achieving universal health coverage, protecting people from health emergencies, and promoting good health and well-being. This pandemic has strengthened our determination to work with governments and partners in these areas.

Within the WHO Secretariat, we are restructuring the Regional Office around delivering on these goals and to improve our drive for measurable results, guided by key performance indicators as part of the regional Transformation Agenda.

We are supporting countries in translating high-level political commitments into policies, strategies and roadmaps towards UHC, working with partners to scale up support to district health teams, and providing guidance to ensure continuity of essential services in the context of COVID-19.

We expect this virus to be with us for a while, and as we adjust to the new normal, I ask that we look for the advantages and work together to maximize the opportunities of new tools and technologies.

The private sector has played a great role in supporting the pandemic response, and this can be leveraged further to build back better with more resilient health systems and sustain the links between preparedness, health promotion, prevention and the determinants of health.

In closing, as we work together to improve the health of populations, it is imperative that health systems are designed to provide people-centred care for individuals at every station in life, with a strong emphasis on equity.

I assure you of WHO's full and continued commitment to making good health a reality for all people in Africa, and I look forward to rich discussions during this session.

Thank you.