



**World Health  
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Africa**

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**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA**

**ORIGINAL: FRENCH**

Seventy-first session

Virtual session, 24–26 August 2021

**STATEMENT BY PROFESSOR BENJAMIN HOUNKPATIN,  
MINISTER OF HEALTH OF BENIN, AND ACTING CHAIRPERSON  
OF THE SEVENTIETH SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE**

Regional Director,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you again for the Seventy-first session of our Regional Committee. I would have preferred that we all meet physically in Lomé for a fraternal and friendly discussion of the major health problems affecting our populations, but the measures and precautions prompted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic prevent us from doing so. My hope is that this is the last session of our Committee that we will hold under these conditions.

I reiterate my congratulations to Honourable Jacqueline Lydia Mikolo on her appointment as Minister of Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises, Handicrafts and the Informal Sector of the Republic of Congo and thank her for her work as Minister of Health and her leadership as Chairperson of the Seventieth session of the Regional Committee for Africa.

Dear Colleagues, I would like to thank you for the honour bestowed on Benin and my humble self, by designating me to serve as Acting Chairperson of the Seventieth session of our Regional Committee.

Regional Director,  
Dear Colleagues,

The Seventy-first session of the Regional Committee is taking place in an exceptional context marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, which spares no country and evolves in successive and ever more deadly waves, and in particular the latest wave caused by the resurgence of the Delta variant. I encourage us to strengthen our integrated and concerted response strategies to ensure that together and within a reasonable time frame, we can control the spread of this devastating virus.

To this end, I welcome all the initiatives taken by the executive management of WHO, WHO in the African Region, the African Union and the COVAX Facility to provide equitable access to vaccines and vaccination against COVID-19, particularly for countries of our Region.

The COVID-19 crisis has heightened awareness of the usefulness of information and communication technologies in the management of health emergencies, but also of its corollary, namely misinformation or fake news, which has complicated the response. In my humble

opinion, this issue must be thoroughly discussed during our deliberations to ensure that we find the appropriate solutions to this infodemic and the vaccine hesitancy it causes.

I would like to reiterate the full support of Benin and that of all the Member States of the African Region for our Regional Director, for her leadership and constancy in coordinating our joint actions. Stand firm, dear sister. You are not alone!!!

Dear Colleagues,

Based on our experience in managing the COVID-19 crisis, we must all work to improve our collective capacity to respond to health threats and emergencies of international concern in order to better protect our populations and make the world safer.

The fight against the COVID-19 pandemic must not cause us to lose sight of the challenges we still face. Recent outbreaks in several countries in the Region (Marburg, Ebola, etc.) remind us of the urgent need to act quickly and effectively and in a coordinated manner in the face of health emergencies.

On that score, the African Region urges WHO to continue to provide its technical assistance to Member States to enable them respond effectively to these emergency situations.

In addition, through the range of themes that will be considered during this session of our Regional Committee, we will be able to fully measure the sacrifices made and the significant efforts deployed by our countries and our Regional Office, as well as the significant achievements in the areas of primary health care, maternal and child health, prevention and control of priority diseases (HIV, malaria, tuberculosis and hepatitis), health systems strengthening and universal health coverage.

Regional Director,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am convinced that a global and concerted approach is the best way to address global health challenges in our Region and in the world, and the only way to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

I wish us all fruitful discussions.

I thank you.