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Lomé, Togo, 22–26 August 2022

**OPENING SPEECH BY HE FAURE ESSOZIMNA GNASSINGBE, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF TOGO, AT THE SEVENTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE WHO
REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA, 22–26 AUGUST 2022**

Right Honourable Prime Minister, Head of Government,
Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly,
Director-General of WHO,
Commissioner of the African Union Commission,
Honourable Ministers,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and Representatives of international organizations accredited to
Togo,
WHO Regional Director for Africa,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear participants,

Director-General, I take this opportunity here today to reiterate to you my hearty congratulations on your recent re-election as Director-General of the World Health Organization and to wish you every success in your new term.

To everyone, I repeat the words of welcome that were earlier addressed to us by the Honourable Minister of Health, Public Hygiene and Universal Access to Health Care, and to state that on behalf of the Government and people of Togo as a whole, we are truly happy and proud that Lomé, our capital city, is hosting the annual session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa – *for the first time*.

History will certainly record that in accordance with the decision taken at the Sixty-ninth session held in Brazzaville in August 2019, this first session hosted by Togo is finally taking place this year, 2022, after two sessions held in virtual mode on account of the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I therefore encourage you, dear participants from sister countries, to set aside time, after these proceedings, to discover the beauty and hospitality of Togo.

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In spite of the improvement in the health situation that has allowed us to assemble here today, this session is still taking place in a context overshadowed by the pandemic, where health is still plagued by inequalities in access to care, climate change, conflicts in many regions of the world, and insecurity on our continent.

Already in May this year, the Seventy-fifth session of the World Health focused on the theme “Health for Peace, Peace for Health”.

Our global reflection must, of necessity, include the impact of these multidimensional crises, whose complexity and persistence threaten the very survival of humanity.

Accordingly, in Africa, as elsewhere, we must take account of the present challenges and above all, act: act to ensure quality care for all, everywhere and at all times; act to provide social protection and universal health coverage to all our fellow citizens; act to eradicate the scourge of substandard and falsified medicines....

A lot needs to be done, that is indisputable.

Nonetheless, in the face of the significant challenges that still have to be overcome, we can legitimately and rightfully acknowledge the progress accomplished and hail them as victories in our struggle to improve life in the broadest sense of the term: to heal and protect, but also to prevent, anticipate and educate.

Director-General,
Distinguished Guests,

Health is a priority for social cohesion, and we have placed it at the heart of our development policy.

One of the objectives of the Government’s road map for 2025 is in fact to “*offer an identity and guarantee health coverage and access to basic services for all*”, in line with the WHO Thirteenth General Programme of Work, which seeks to ensure that one billion more people benefit from universal health coverage.

In that respect, we have reformed our institutional framework, notably with the establishment of a delegated ministry in charge of universal health care within the Ministry of Health.

In terms of our legislative framework, among other measures, we have adopted a law instituting universal health insurance, which will be implemented by the National Health Insurance Institute.

Our health sector policy fully incorporates the One Health concept through the implementation of the holistic approach that we have adopted.

In that regard, for close to a year now, we have been implementing a support programme for pregnant women and newborns, with the objective of enhancing their access to health services and care. The appreciable enthusiasm the programme is generating among its beneficiaries in public and accredited health centres encourages us to continue it and even expand the package of services.

Meanwhile, our children in primary and secondary schools are eligible for dedicated medical assistance, with about 2 million of them benefiting from it thus far.

In general, the availability of human resources has improved with the decentralization of training institutions and health facilities, through the construction and equipping of facilities in accordance with the health map; this has led to a significant increase in geographical access to health care, currently estimated at 76%.

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In line with our constant concern to preserve the health of our populations, we have taken a number of concerted actions, one of which is the *Lomé Initiative* launched here on 18 January 2020 by Togo and five other African countries, namely Congo, Ghana, Niger, Uganda and Senegal.

The political declaration of the *Initiative* calls for the implementation of national plans to combat substandard and falsified medicines, with interministerial action and coordination between government services and the private sector.

Recalling that close to half of the reported cases of trafficking are from sub-Saharan Africa, and *worse still*, that the deaths of over 100 000 children below the age of five years each year are related to the use of poor quality antimalarials, I appeal to all the other countries that have still not signed up to the *Initiative* to join us in this struggle.

We consider commitment to health as a responsibility, but it is, above all, the key to harmony, progress and peace for our societies.

In that regard, I thank you for appreciating the results obtained by my country in the eradication of neglected tropical diseases, and its response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Director-General,
Distinguished Guests,

This progress was achieved by dint of the dedication and commitment of all national health stakeholders, as well as the support and concern of our partners.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the stakeholders working at all levels in our country to preserve this precious asset that is health.

On our collective behalf, I convey our thanks to all the partner institutions and organizations working in the health sector in Togo and supporting our efforts.

I cannot fail to use this opportunity to pay special tribute to the World Health Organization.

Our relations have indeed transcended institutional cooperation per se, and now constitute a genuine partnership to support our health systems, coordinate emergency responses, defend vaccine equity; in a word, it is a partnership that guides us, learning from current crises, with a view to sustainable, equitable and sound solutions.

As it were, the unfinished COVID-19 episode has served to highlight the importance of the multilateralism embodied by WHO, which has resolutely stood with the most vulnerable, together with the African Union Vaccine Acquisition Task Team.

By so doing, you have provided further proof that solidarity remains a necessary ingredient of global health, particularly for updating its financing mechanisms and reviewing the International Health Regulations.

I encourage you to continue to be Africa's voice in forums where crucial issues affecting the future of the world are discussed.

I am certain that the Transformation Agenda of WHO in Africa initiated by Dr Matshidiso Moeti (the WHO Regional Director for Africa) will contribute to enhancing the quality of our Region's contributions to global health issues, as it seeks to place people at the centre of change and to promote a culture defined by our shared values.

It is my hope that the deliberations of this session will enable our Region in particular and the World Health Organization in general to provide ever more efficient, human and sustainable responses to the needs of our States and especially those of our populations.

It is on this note of confidence that I declare open the Seventy-second session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa.