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ADDRESS BY HONOURABLE PROF. DOROTHÉE KINDE GAZARD, MINISTER OF HEALTH OF THE REPUBLIC OF BENIN, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE SIXTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA

- Your Excellency the President of the Republic, Head of State and Head of Government,
- Heads of institutions of the Republic of Benin,
- The WHO Director-General,
- The WHO Regional Director for Africa,
- The Honourable Cabinet Minister in charge of higher education and scientific research,
- Members of Government,
- Honourable African Ministers of Health and Heads of Delegation,
- Members of the diplomatic corps and representatives of international organizations,
- Distinguished delegates at the Sixty-fourth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa,
- Distinguished guests,
- Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great joy for me to welcome you to Benin, at the Cotonou Conference Centre, where the Sixty-fourth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa is taking place.

On this day of official opening of the Sixty-fourth session, I would like to thank you, Your Excellency the President of the Republic, for supporting our country's bid to host this meeting and for facilitating its organization.

I would also like to pay a deserved tribute to Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General, for her guidance and for endorsing the choice of our country to host this Regional Committee session, during the previous one that took place in Brazzaville in 2013.

Thank you also, Director-General, for accepting not only to be among us here in Cotonou but also to share with us your experiences and enlightened expertise.

Dr Luis Gomes Sambo, I would be remiss if I did not mention your attentiveness to the Organizing Committee, your advice and suggestions, and the technical support provided by your team.

Honourable Ministers of Health, I would like to thank you because this Regional Committee session would not have taken place here had you not massively approved the choice of Benin.

- Your Excellency the President of the Republic,
- The WHO Director-General,
- The WHO Regional Director for Africa,
- Distinguished Heads of Delegation at this session,
- Ladies and gentlemen,

At this Sixty-fourth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, we will discuss major health issues that pose real challenges to us in Africa. Despite the considerable progress made in the past decades, neglected tropical diseases, noncommunicable diseases and many other diseases largely affect the daily lives of a substantial segment of our populations.

We are only a few months away from the 2015 deadline for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Yet, despite the significant progress we have made, some of our countries are still not on track to achieve the MDGs.

During our deliberations, we will discuss the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak, which has revealed the actual capacities of health systems in Africa to deal with emergencies.

I therefore have no doubt that we will be able to pool our ideas, proposals, experiences and knowledge in order to find suitable solutions to the challenges we face.

As we begin the Sixty-fourth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, I consider it proper to pay a tribute to the WHO Director-General and her entire team, to the WHO Regional Director for Africa and his entire staff, to you, dear colleagues, Ministers of Health, and to all stakeholders of Africa's health system, for exercising courage in the delicate management of health issues.

- Your Excellency the President of the Republic,
- The WHO Director-General,
- The WHO Regional Director for Africa,
- Distinguished Heads of Delegation,
- Ladies and gentlemen,

To you all, dear delegates who have gathered here for the Sixty-fourth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, I wish you to be inspired and enjoy your stay in our country.

Long live health at the service of development!

Long live international and regional cooperation!

Long live the Sixty-fourth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa!

Long live Benin!

Thank you for your kind attention.