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Addis Ababa, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 19–23 August 2016

TITLE

SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR KESETEBIRHAN ADMASU, MINISTER OF HEALTH OF THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA

Your Excellency Dr Mulatu Teshome, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,
Your Excellency Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization,
Honorable Ministers of Health of Member States of the African Region,
Honorable Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this annual gathering of the World Health Organization's Sixty-sixth session of the Regional Committee meeting for Africa.

On behalf of my Government I want to say how glad we are to host the Sixty-sixth WHO Afro annual meeting in Addis Ababa.

At this annual meeting we'll be deliberating and passing critical decisions, adopt resolutions and endorse strategies on key public health issues of the African continent. The consensus we reach will also enable us to align our national health policies and strategies with the decisions reached in this meeting.

In reviewing the planned agenda for our meeting, what I noticed was that we will be dealing with a myriad of agenda items. Agenda items for discussion include, beginning from routine administrative procedural actions such as the nomination of a Chair and Vice-Chairperson — to topic areas such as noncommunicable diseases, security and emergencies, responses related to Ebola, children's and adolescents health, end TB, HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis, malaria, SDGs, emergency fund, regulation of medical products, disaster risk management, and so on — to be precise, there 24 agenda items have been listed!

What this should tell us that we have a lot on our plates. And these agenda items are not easy, they are quite challenging and, in some cases, daunting.

Honorable guests and ministers,

While we have made significant progress in some of the agenda items listed for deliberation, with many, we have long ways to go and some are emerging and are on the way of becoming a threat — they cannot be ignored and or left to the next generation. We must collaboratively act on them now, there is no room for complacency.

On the other hand, not all is doom and gloom, in the two past decades, we have strived valiantly and succeeded in either arresting diseases such as EBOLA and or mitigating many diseases from becoming a scourge. Moreover, across our continent, we have successfully increased the life span expectancy of our populace, reduced maternal and infant mortalities, decreased the rates of infection of HIV, TB and malaria, made services available to the larger populace — the list goes on. What this should tell us all is that, if there is a will there is a way — collectively, as health is a key engine to happiness and prosperity, we can also increase the quality of life of our people. I'm confident that we can and will do so — this should also be our collective mandate.

It this good enough — no, not really — more challenges awaits us. As you know, there are too many that have not been a beneficiary of the progress that we have made, equity is of paramount importance, because no one should be left behind.

While we have also increased the span of our services, we have to also address the quality of services being rendered – because service quality impacts health outcomes.

We have to ensure that the services rendered are provide with compassion and respect — no less should be acceptable.

Moreover, in addition to sustaining the gains we have made on the Millennium Development Goals, we also need to embrace the Sustainable Development Goals. As you know, the SDGs encompass broader agendas including social, economic and environmental determinants of health.

Let me conclude my talk by quoting William Jennings Bryan when he said: “Destiny is no matter of chance. It is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for; it is a thing to be achieved.”

Finally, I'm confident that, both our deliberations in this meeting will be productive and your stay in Addis pleasant. Please don't hesitate to tell us what else we can do to make your stay memorable, my staff are on standby to help!

Thank you.