

Agenda Item 6 - Annual Report of the Regional Director on the Work of WHO AFRO- Region

Input by Minister of Health of South Africa

Date: 25 August 2025

Time: 14:30 – 16:00

Venue: Lusaka, Zambia

Honourable Chair, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, and guests,

On behalf of South Africa, I would like to extend our warmest congratulations to the Government and people of Zambia for assuming the chairship of the WHO-AFRO. We also appreciate the hospitality and warm welcome extended to us in Lusaka. We would like to once again congratulate Professor Mohamed Yakub Janani on his assumption as the new Regional Director of the WHO-Africa Region. We look forward to working with him and appreciate his leadership in advancing health agendas in our region.

We commend the Programme SubCommittee, for its comprehensive statement. We align ourselves with the key issues raised and priorities identified, including accelerating progress in the health and well-being of women, children, and adolescents by transforming health systems in our region, as well as strengthening Africa's health security.

I would like to acknowledge the achievements highlighted in the WHO Regional Office for Africa's report. Despite financial constraints, WHO supported 47 member states in progressing towards Universal Health Coverage, with a focus on Primary Health Care. The District Health for All approach was implemented in 17 countries. WHO also responded to 168 public health emergencies and improved emergency preparedness in 36 countries. Additionally, five countries validated the elimination of at least one Neglected Tropical Disease, and nutrition efforts were advanced in 28 countries.

However, we are concerned that in advancing these plans, there is a paucity of debate regarding how our efforts are going to be financed in a sustainable manner. The recent withdrawals of international partners and donors in supporting health systems in developing countries, particularly in the Africa Region, create sustainability concerns. The defunding and under-funding of our health systems threaten and undermine any progress that we might have made in strengthening health systems and achieving universal health coverage.

In light of this, South Africa wishes to reiterate and emphasize the importance of self-reliance in financing our health systems. We need to advocate for increased domestic financial resource mobilization through our fiscus. We believe that investing in our own health systems is crucial for sustainable development and improving the health and well-being of our populations.

Chairperson, we wish to state without any equivocation or fear of contradiction, that while International solidarity is very precious and appreciated, today's uncertain world, the primary responsibility of taking care of the health of citizens lies with Member States and no one else.

We urge member states to prioritize health financing and explore innovative financing mechanisms to support our health systems as we approach the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. By doing so, we can reduce our dependence on external funding and ensure that our health systems are resilient and responsive to the needs of our people.

Let us work together to strengthen our health systems, promote universal health coverage, and ensure that our people have access to quality healthcare services without experiencing financial hardships. We are committed to collaborating with WHO-AFRO and other partners to achieve these goals.

Thank you.