

REPORT OF AN EMERGENCY MEETING OF AFRICA MINISTERS OF HEALTH ON **THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK**



22 February 2020
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

I. INTRODUCTION

In January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), following the rapid increase in confirmed cases globally. To date, COVID-19 has resulted in 80,000+ confirmed cases, 2,700+ deaths in 27+ countries globally. While there is only one confirmed case in Africa so far, COVID-19 poses a great threat to the continent given Africa's close linkages with China and its relatively fragile health systems. The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) is well positioned to support Member States in their preparedness and response to COVID-19, by leveraging its assets across the continent: Africa CDC's Headquarters and Regional Collaborating Centres (RCCs), the African Union political, policy, and advocacy systems, National Public Health Institutes, laboratory networks for influenza and pathogen genomics, and academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, and private sector partners.

In order to strengthen the continent's preparedness and response to the outbreak, the African Union Commission (AUC) and Africa CDC convened an emergency ministerial meeting on the COVID-19 with the following objectives and outcomes:

- Objectives of the meeting
 - Provide an update to Member States on the current situation of COVID-19 globally and across the continent
- Discuss and agree on a joint continental strategy to better prepare and response to the potential spread of the virus on the continent
- Discuss and agree on a common approach for Monitoring and Movement Restrictions of people at risk for COVID-19, including receiving African students and others wishing to return from China
- Share knowledge and latest information on COVID-19 vaccine and drug development pipeline and clinical trials
- Expected outcomes of the meeting
 - Member States are updated and have a common understanding of the current situation of COVID-19 disease outbreak and the efforts that Africa CDC and WHO are undertaking to support the continent
 - Member States agree on and endorse guidance on Monitoring and Movement Restrictions of people at risk for COVID-19
 - Member States align on a set of critical steps that each country will take (with support of partners) to better prepare for potential introduction and spread of COVID-19



II. ATTENDANCE

The meeting was attended by the following AU Ministers of Health, State Ministers of Health or their representatives from Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Arab Republic of Egypt, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Tanzania, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, and Zambia. Representatives from WHO (HQ, AFRO and EMRO), ECOWAS, COMESA, IGAD, AfDB, People's Republic of China, United Kingdom, United States of America, ICAO, AFENET, EDCTP, Janssen Vaccine, CISSA, and BMGF were also in attendance.

The list of participants is available in the appendix to this report.

III. ADOPTION OF THE PROGRAMME OF WORK

The draft agenda was presented to the assembly by Africa CDC and was adopted without amendment.



IV. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION AND OPENING REMARKS

The meeting opened with a welcome remark from H.E. Mrs. Amira Elfadil (Commissioner for Social Affairs, Africa Union Commission). She stressed that in the context of COVID-19, prevention is always better than cure and that the African Union will continue to support member states on prevention, diagnostics, and treatment. She thanked WHO and partners, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and China for their continued support.

Dr. Matshidiso Moeti (Regional Director, WHO Regional Office for Africa) then gave her remarks, stressing that WHO is committed to support Africa on COVID-19 having implemented multiple initiatives around readiness, case management, rapid response, Infection Prevention Control (IPC) etc. She also congratulated Dr. John Nkengasong, Director of Africa CDC, for his designation along with Professor Samba Sow, Director General of the Center for Vaccine Development in Mali, and Dr. Maha El Rabbat, Former Health Minister of Egypt as special envoys on COVID-19.

H.E. Max Limoukou (Minister of Health of Gabon and Vice Chair of the Governing Board of Africa CDC) in his welcome remarks said, "The world has been shaken regarding this outbreak. Except for Egypt, we have been relatively spared from this outbreak. We need to use this window opportunity to build our capacity to respond to COVID-19 in Africa".



Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (Director General, World Health Organization), thereafter, spoke to the assembly, stating that WHO's biggest concern continues to be the potential for COVID-19 to spread in countries with weaker health systems. In light of this, he said that WHO's Africa regional office in partnership with the Africa CDC are working hard to prepare countries in Africa for the potential arrival of the virus and called for countries to invest urgently in preparedness, taking advantage of the window of opportunity Africa has.

Dr. John Nkengasong (Director, Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention) then shared the meeting's objectives and expected outcomes – see above for the details.

Thereafter, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, officially opened the meeting. In his speech, the Chairperson stated that if drastic measures are not taken urgently, Africa will be exposed to COVID-19. As such, over the last couple of weeks, the African Union through the Africa CDC has launched a task force to strengthen the continent's preparedness and response, he said. He also expressed solidarity and support with the people of China, thanked all partners and congratulated Egypt for its effective management of its first COVID-19 confirmed case.



SESSION 2: UPDATE ON COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Dr. John Nkengasong opened the session by providing an overview of the COVID-19 situation globally, stressing that even with drastic and restrictive containment measures in place, the outbreak shows no sign of slowing down. Africa is especially at risk due to its strong linkages with China and fragile health systems. As a result, a continent-wide strategy based on effective coordination, collaboration and communication is needed to ensure Rapid Detection and Rapid Containment of COVID-2019.

SESSION 3: COORDINATING PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE STRATEGY AT CONTINENTAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

3A. AFRICA COVID-19 TASK FORCES ON PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE



Dr John Nkengasong presented Africa CDC's COVID-19 continent-wide strategy which is grounded on the establishment of the Africa Taskforce for Coronavirus (AFTCOR). The AFTCOR comprises of joint working groups between Africa CDC, WHO, and technical experts from member states across 5 pillars:

- Surveillance / points-of-entry screening
- Infection prevention and control
- Clinical management of severe infections
- Lab diagnostics and subtyping
- Risk communication

Dr Nkengasong shared key AFTCOR initiatives completed and underway which includes training of 35+ Member States across the 5 pillars, technical assistance on IPC protocols, development of clinician and laboratory referral networks etc. Key collaboration areas (surveillance, contact tracing, quarantine) with private sector partners were also presented and immediate actions required from Member States were laid out.

The floor was opened for discussion where 25+ ministers / their representatives each shared their country's initiatives to prepare and respond to COVID-19. The ministers were generally aligned with the Continental strategy, but raised issues that need to be clearly addressed in the strategy such as but not limited to:

- Security of personal protective equipment (PPE) supply
- Close collaboration across countries on surveillance (employing a regional approach), research and technical expertise
- Private sector involvement in risk communication and community engagement
- Coordinated support for African citizens / residents in China and other outbreak areas
- Common approach for quarantine
- Membership of AFTCOR working groups which should include representatives from all regions

As a result of the discussion, a separate AFTCOR pillar for "Supply chain and stockpiling medical commodities" will be set up. AFTCOR working groups' membership will be finalized to include representatives from all regions. Other issues raised will be included in the mandates or initiatives of the respective AFTCOR working groups.

The session closed with ministers / their representatives endorsing a Joint Continental Strategy that will be led by the AFTCOR taskforce, in order to address a potential outbreak of COVID-19

3B. OUTCOMES OF REGIONAL MINISTERIAL MEETINGS ON COVID-19

West Africa

Prof. Stanley Okolo, Director General of the West Africa Health Organization (WAHO), shared the outcomes of the West Africa Ministerial Meeting on COVID-19 that was held last February 14 in Bamako, which include:

- WAHO to adapt WHO guidelines to local context, develop a regional contingency plan, improve coordination and communication across countries, manage supply of diagnostic kits and facilitate mechanism for bulk purchasing.
- Countries to strengthen cross border collaboration, enhance surveillance at all points-of-entry, improve risk communication, strengthen diagnostics capacities, develop costed multi-sector strategic preparedness plans, ensure availability of critical medical supplies and work closely with Chinese government to safeguard citizens in China.

WAHO will also conduct simulation exercises with rapid response team on March 5 and will continue to sensitize all stakeholders to catalyze financing for the region.

Central Africa

Central Africa held a regional ministerial meeting in Malabo on February 18-20, 2020 to intensify collaboration on cross-border surveillance for COVID-19. Recommendations from the meeting include the following: finalization and validation of contingency plans, set up of isolation centers at points-of-entries, continued advocacy for resource mobilization for implementation of response activities, promotion of research for better understanding of COVID-19, and convening of another regional ministerial meeting before March 7, 2020.

Following the presentation, the ministers discussed how they can strengthen their response to COVID-19 within the AFTCOR framework. Key suggestions included:

- Standardization and strengthening of surveillance efforts
- Development of mechanism for resource mobilization (especially for multi-laterals, development partners)
- Leveraging RCCs to facilitate regional coordination and collaboration
- Involvement of private sector to strengthen surveillance with focus on high risk points-of-entries (e.g., trainings conducted by ICAO)



- Gathering of timely information on case management and treatment from China

Recommendations arising from the session include:

- Incorporation of above suggestions into the mandate of respective AFTCOR working groups and Way Forward
- WHO’s global technical expert team to share latest information on treatment and knowledge from China in coordination with Africa CDC and WHO country offices

SESSION 4: AFRICA CDC’S GUIDANCE FOR ASSESSMENT, MONITORING AND MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS OF PEOPLE AT RISK FOR COVID-19

Dr. Benjamin Djoudalbaye opened the session by sharing Africa CDC’s Guidance for Assessment, Monitoring and Movement Restrictions of People at Risk for COVID-19.

In the subsequent panel, Ministers from Morocco and Ethiopia then shared their country’s experiences and approach in quarantining at-risk persons.

In addition, H.E. Minister of Health of Morocco informed the assembly that there will be a high-level meeting on diplomacy, health security and international health regulations in Marrakesh on February 24-26, 2020 which is jointly organized by the Kingdom of Morocco, Rwanda, WHO and World Bank.

Furthermore, he presented the Kingdom of Morocco’s offer to host the Africa CDC HQ in Morocco. This suggestion was seconded by Rwanda, however, delegations from Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Botswana, Nigeria and Tunisia did not support the proposal, stating that bids for the seat of Africa CDC should be addressed through regular African Union (AU) channels and in line with AU structures, not during an emergency meeting on COVID-19; thus discussion of this issue was deferred.

After the presentations, a discussion around quarantine policies ensued. The ministers raised questions around the following (not exhaustive):

- Guidance on whether to repatriate citizens or not
- Enforcement approaches for countries that do not have quarantine policies to refer to
- Guidance on whether a second diagnostic test is required before person can be released from quarantine
- Guidance on protective equipment required for staff at points-of-entry
- Effectiveness of and alternatives to home isolation in cases where person lives with family member
- Definition of “high risk outbreak areas” and length of stay in these areas for a person to be classified as “Some Risk”
- Proper definition and use of the term “quarantine”



Inputs from participants were considered and incorporated into the final version of the policy. WHO-AFRO also suggested for Member States to refer to WHO guidelines to address some of the concerns above e.g., recommendations on repatriation and protocols to use.

SESSION 5: ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION ON THE ROLE OF EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS TO PREPARE AND RESPOND TO COVID-19

Ministers and private sector representatives aligned on the importance private sector partnerships not only in preparing and responding to COVID-19, but also strengthening health systems i.e., IHR implementation.

ICAO shared that it has led surveillance trainings in partnership with Africa CDC and WHO for the aviation sector. European Developing Countries Trial Partnership shared that it will be leading a training in collaboration with Africa CDC for epidemiologists on epidemic research.

SUMMARY OF MEETING, WAY FORWARD, ADDIS ABABA COMMUNIQUE ON COVID-19

The Communique was read out and the ministers provided their inputs thereafter Comments on the Communique were considered and incorporated in the final

Communique. Dr John Nkengasong presented the Way Forward which was agreed upon by the ministers, WHO, African Union Commission and Africa CDC.

1. In the next one week, Africa CDC and WHO to finalize membership of all pillars of the Africa Taskforce for Coronavirus (AFTCOR)
2. In the next one week, Africa CDC and WHO to develop a joint schedule of capacity development to support Member States across the strategic pillars of the AFTCOR
3. All Member States to expeditiously complete their COVID-19 strategic plans by mid-March
4. Africa CDC and WHO to work closely to accelerate stockpiling of PPE and quality-assured diagnostics by end of March
5. Africa CDC Guidance for Assessment, Monitoring, and Movement Restrictions of People at Risk for COVID-19 to be finalized in the next one week and circulated
6. Africa CDC, African Union Commission (AUC) and WHO to maintain advocacy for mobilization of resources

V. CLOSING OF MEETING

H.E. Mrs Amira Elfadil (Commissioner for Social Affairs, Africa Union Commission) thanked all participants for their active participation, their great leadership, and their attendance despite the short notice for the meeting. She stressed the importance of implementation and committed that AUC and Africa CDC will continue to play its role in supporting Member States and expects Member States and partners to do the same.

H.E. Lia Tadesse, State Minister of Health of Ethiopia, led the vote of thanks, closing the meeting.

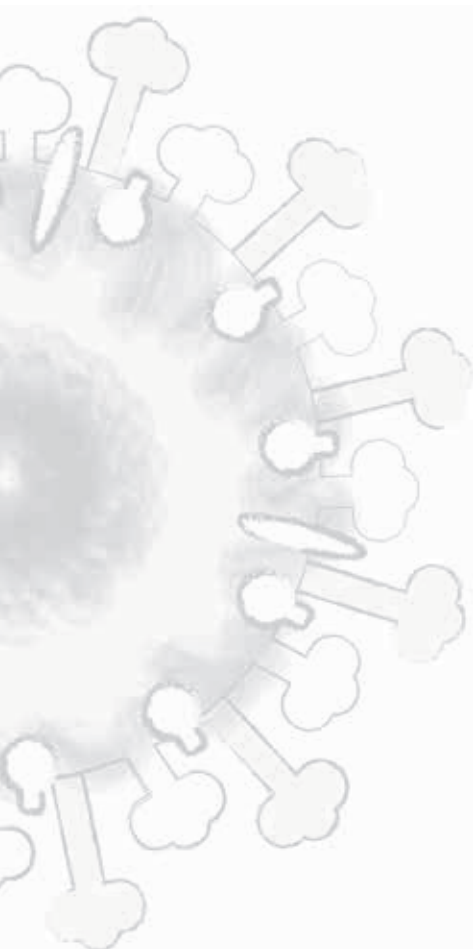
APPENDIX

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

SN	Title	Name	Country	Institution	Function
1	Dr	Osagie E. Ehanire	Nigeria	Federal Ministry of Health	Minister of Health
2	Mrs	Chukwueke Chukwueke	Nigeria	Federal Ministry of Health	Assistant
3	Dr	Priscilla Ibekwe	Nigeria	NCDC	Deputy Director
4	Dr	Eteni Longondo	DRC	Ministry of Health	Minister
5	Mrs	Therese Bundama	DRC	Ministry of Health	Secretary
6	Dr	Claudia Mbongo	DRC	Ministry of Health	Expert
7	Mr	James Ngoy Kwa	DRC	Ministry of Health	Protocol officer
8	Dr	Aruna Abedi	DRC	Ministry of Health	Expert
9	Ms	Barkha Mossae	Mauritius	Mauritius Embassy Addis Ababa	Diplomat
10	Dr	Lia Tadesse	Ethiopia	Federal Ministry of Health	State Minister
11	Dr	Munir Kassa	Ethiopia	Federal Ministry of Health	Chief of staff – State Minister
12	Dr	John Chamunorwa Mangwiro	Zimbabwe	Ministry of Health	Deputy Minister
13	Dr	Isaac Phiri	Zimbabwe	Ministry of Health	Epidemiologist
14	Amb.	Albert Chindindi	Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe Embassy Addis Ababa	Ambassador
15	Mr	Tichakembu Mutsagekwa	Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe Embassy Addis Ababa	Counsellor
16	Dr	Eduardo Gudo	Mozambique	NPHI	Deputy Director
17	Ms	Petronella Masabane	Namibia	Ministry of Health	Deputy Executive Director
18	Mrs	Philomena Ochurus	Namibia	Ministry of Health	Director
19	Dr	Richard Kamwi	Namibia	E8 SADC	Africa CDC champion
20	Dr	Bernard Haufiku	Namibia	Ministry of Health	Advisor / APHF Founder
21	Mr	Angok Gordon Kuol	South Sudan	Ministry of Health	Expert
22	Mrs	Nabbanja Robinah	Uganda	Ministry of Health	State Minister
23	Dr	Alex Rioplexus Ario	Uganda	Uganda PHI	Public Health Emergencies Director
24	Dr	Patrick Moonasar	South Africa	Ministry of Health	Expert
25	Ms	Harriel Mokgethi	South Africa	SA Embassy in Addis Ababa	First secretary
26	Dr	Mahamoud Khayal Youssouf	Chad	Ministry of Health	Minister
27	Mr	Youssouf Hamid	Chad	Ministry of Health	Counsellor
28	Dr	Sonia Ben Cheikh	Tunisia	Ministry of Health	Minister
29	Pr	Nissaf Ben Alaya	Tunisia	Observatory of New Diseases	Director General

SN	Title	Name	Country	Institution	Function
30	Mr	Hedi Labidi	Tunisia	Tunisia Embassy Addis Ababa	First secretary
31	Dr	Chitalu Chilufya	Zambia	Ministry of Health	Minister
32	Dr	Victor Mukonka	Zambia	Ministry of Health – ZNPHI	Director
33	Dr	Fabian Kabulubulu	Zambia	Zambia Embassy in Addis Ababa	
34	Mr	John Chisanga	Zambia	Zambia Embassy in Addis Ababa	
35	Ms	Mary Muwowo	Zambia	Zambia Embassy in Addis Ababa	
36	Dr	Aloyse Wally Diouf	Senegal	Ministry of Health	Chief of staff
37	Mr	Ibrahima Sylla	Senegal	Senegal Embassy in Addis Ababa	First secretary
38	Mr	Malick Ndao	Senegal	Senegal Embassy in Addis Ababa	First counsellor
39	Mrs	Mikolo Jacqueline Lydia	Republic of Congo	Ministry of Health	Minister
40	Dr	Ndziessi Gilbert	Republic of Congo	Ministry of Health	Counsellor
41	Mrs	Evelyne Mobie	Republic of Congo	Embassy	Counsellor
42	Mr	Taty	Republic of Congo	Ministry of Health	Protocol officer
43	Mrs	Hon. Phohleli Manthabiseng	Lesotho	Ministry of Health	Minister
44	Dr	Makhoase Ranyali-Otubanjo	Lesotho	Ministry of Health	Director
45	Mr	Monaphatti Maraka	Lesotho	Embassy	Counsellor
46	Mr	Khalid Ait Taleb	Morocco	Ministry of Health	Minister
47	Dr	Youbi Mohammed	Morocco	Ministry of Health	Director
48	Amb.	Mohammed Arrouchi	Morocco	Embassy	Ambassador
49	Mr	Hassan Boukili	Morocco	Embassy	Deputy Representative
50	Mr	Anas Bourbabe	Morocco	Embassy	First secretary
51	Dr	George Kasera	Kenya	Ministry of Health	PHEOC Manager
52	Pr	Akory Ag Iknane	Mali	Ministry of Health – NPHI	Director General
53	Mr	Amadou Moro	Mali	Embassy	Counsellor
54	Dr	Leonard Subi	Tanzania	Ministry of Health	Director
55	Dr	Kokou Tossa	Togo	Ministry of Health	EOC- Coordinator
56	Mr	Boulama Ousmane	Niger	Ministry of Health	Director
57	Dr	Armand Rafalimanaweso Solofoniaina	Madagascar	Ministry of Health	Director
58	Pr	Vroh Joseph Benie Bi	Cote d'Ivoire	Ministry of health – NPHI	Director
59	Dr	Georges Alain Etoundi Mballa	Cameroon	Ministry of Health	Director
60	Dr	Dirieh Mohammed Warsama	Djibouti	Ministry of Health	Minister
61	Dr	Mohammed Osman Hassan	Djibouti	Ministry of Health	Expert

SN	Title	Name	Country	Institution	Function
62	Dr	Djaanfar Abdourahamane	Comoros	Ministry of Health	Director
63	Dr	Chamssoudine Mohammed	Comoros	Ministry of Health	Expert
64	Mr	Max Limoukou	Gabon	Ministry of Health	Minister
65	Dr	Boukani Gilberte	Gabon	Ministry of Health	Expert
66	Dr	Evelyn Chitsa Banda	Malawi	Ministry of Health	Expert
67	Mr	Mhango Jappie Chancy	Malawi	Ministry of Health	Minister
68	Pr	Stanley Okolo	Nigeria	WAHO	Director General
69	Dr	Alaa Eldin Elsayed Mohammed	Egypt	Ministry of Health	Director
70	Dr	Mohamed Abdelfatah Abdel Mawla	Egypt	Ministry of Health	Expert
71	Dr	Moeti Matshidiso		WHO AFRO	Regional Director
72	Dr	Ambrose Talisuna		WHO AFRO	
73	Dr	Innocent Ntaganira		WHO AFRO	Liaison officer to AU & ECA
74	Dr	Richard Brennan		WHO EMRO	Ag. Regional Emergency Director
75	Dr	Simon Nyovuura Antara		AFENET	Executive Director
76	Dr	Rebecca Barirye		AFENET	Epidemiologist
77	Dr	Tatek Bogale		AFENET	Regional coordinator
78	Dr	Elizabeth Owiti		AfDB	Principal Health Economist
79	Dr	Tobias Kamphuis		Janssen Vaccines	Project leader
80	Dr	Kathleen Gallagher		US CDC	Program Director
81	Mr	Zainab Ali Kotoku		CISSA	Representative
82	Amb.	Liu Yu Xi	China		Ambassador
83	Dr	Solomon Zewdu		BMGF	Director of Health
84	Dr	Girum Haile Maheteme		IGAD	Senior Advisor
85	Mr	Timothy Mlay		Hyatt Regency Addis Ababa	Director of rooms
86	Mr	Melaku Sima		Hilton Addis Ababa	Director
87	Mr	Barry Kashambo		ICAO	Regional Director
88	Mr	Leonardo Simao		EDCTP	Africa High representative



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