

COMMUNIQUE OF THE HIGH-LEVEL MINISTERIAL MEETING ON HEALTH SECURITY

BY MEMBER STATES OF THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REGION

We, the Ministers of Health of the African Union Member States in the Central African Region, gathered on 27 October 2023 in Oyala, Equatorial Guinea;

NOTING WITH CONCERN the increasing number of public health events and recurrent epidemics on the continent; and the enormous socio-economic impact;

AWARE of the high burden of epidemics and other emergency events in our Region, and the imminent risks of emerging and re-emerging diseases;

RECOGNIZING the challenges in coordinating and managing resources, information and data, to prepare for and respond to multiple disease outbreaks and other emergencies in Africa, including the burden of hospital-acquired infections and the need to strengthen Infection Prevention and Control in hospital and community settings;

RECOGNIZING also the importance of primary health care as a basis for equity in health and the role of communities in early warning, detection and response to public health events and epidemics;

ACKNOWLEDGING the relevant existing frameworks, protocols, strategies and agreements;

WELCOMING the Lusaka Call-to-Action to strengthen Public Health Emergency Operations Centres (PHEOCs) in Africa;

COMMENDING the close collaborations and the efforts being made by the Africa CDC, WHO, and other partners to strengthen and establish PHEOCs;

MINDFUL that the African Union Member States are at different stages of establishment of national and functional PHEOCs to fulfil the International Health Regulations (IHR) commitments.

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the importance of cross-border movements and the interconnection of communities, as well as the role of population mobility and migration across borders in the spread of epidemics, epizootics and public health emergencies;

AWARE of the negative impact of epidemics, epizootics and public health emergencies on regional and global economic and social development, particularly in the Central African region;

CONSCIOUS of the inadequacy of data sharing, the interoperability of data systems and the lack of clear guidelines for cross-border information exchange and collaboration in public health;

NOTING the importance of coordination and cooperation between neighbouring countries in preparing for and responding to the international spread of infectious diseases or public health events of international concern;

CALL UPON AU Member States in the Central Region to:

- Establish and/or strengthen PHEOCs with legal mandates, equipped with the right infrastructure, and dedicated, well-trained human resources within the next two years;
- Provide national PHEOCs with sustainable financing for effective operations in responding to public health emergencies;
- Support the establishment of a regional PHEOC technical Working group (TWG) that sets the priorities and tracks the progress of PHEOC implementation in the region; and
- Include PHEOCs as a standing agenda item in the Regional Steering Committee meetings.
- Establish bilateral and multilateral agreements/instruments to facilitate cross-border collaboration and exchange of public health information as part of a One Health approach.
- Develop and implement joint action plans to strengthen cross-border surveillance activities to prevent and respond to public health emergencies of international concern.
- Strengthen Infection Prevention and Control in hospital and community settings.
- Strengthen primary healthcare to better prepare the response to public health events and epidemics.

CALL UPON Africa CDC to:

- Establish and facilitate a regional PHEOC TWG to set the regional priorities and track progress of PHEOC implementation in the region; and
- Establish a continental public health emergency management training program to meet the growing needs of well-trained human resources for PHEOCs;
- Develop a continental framework to guide the strengthening of cross-border surveillance and information sharing with a clear focus on regional priorities and strategic action plans.
- Establish a committee of Africa CDC legal experts and representatives of Central African member states to agree the modalities for concluding the data sharing agreement, including the provision of political and regulatory support as part of an overall commitment to the data sharing agreement in the Central African region;
- Assist AU Member States in adapting and operationalising the continental cross-border surveillance strategy.
- Provide technical support to strengthen Infection Prevention and Control in hospitals and communities.

FURTHER CALL UPON WHO, other partners and stakeholders in emergency preparedness and response to:

- Closely coordinate and collaborate with Africa CDC, and provide the necessary support to the Regional PHEOC TWG and efforts to strengthen cross-border surveillance;
- Support AU Member States to fast track implementation of the Lusaka Call to Action; and
- Mobilize the necessary resources and experts to accelerate the implementation of the national PHEOC roadmaps, the continental cross-border surveillance strategy and the joint cross-border action plans.

This communique is delivered at the High-level Ministerial Meeting on Health Security in Central African Region **on the 27th of October 2023, in Oyala, Equatorial Guinea.**