



Remarks at the Opening Session of the 75th Session of The WHO Regional Committee for Africa (RC75) Lusaka, Zambia



**H.E. DR JEAN
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

H.E. Hakainde Hichilema,
President of Zambia, Tedros
Adhanom Ghebreyesus,
Director General, WHO,
Mohamed Yakub Janabi
Regional Director, WHO-
AFRO, Hon. Dr. Elijah Muchima
Minister of Health/Chairperson
of Africa CDC Governing
Board, Excellencies

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

"Independence cannot be real if a nation depends upon gifts." This wisdom from President Julius Nyerere in 1967 resonates today more than ever. For our continent, autonomy and sovereignty are not abstract ideals, they are the foundation that must be built on true solidarity and true unity.

We have seen what solidarity looks like elsewhere. Europeans unified their voice to negotiate through European Union 15% of taxes. Without invitation, European leaders flew to Washington to defend their collective interest over Ukraine. Us as Africans, we need to stand up and raise our voice when others are facing taxes that harm their economies or asked to pay 15,000 USD to secure a visa. We all know that Africa cannot prosper in isolation. Unity and solidarity are instruments of our common survival.

Excellencies, 1 year ago, I declared Mpox a PHECS. Together with WHO, we established and co-lead the continental Incident management Support Team (IMST), bringing together 30 partners to successfully support affected countries. IMST has become a model of partnership and delivery, now leading the response to cholera.

For all outbreaks, we are facing 2 major challenges: lack of medical countermeasures and lack of sustainable funding.

Each year, Africa loses over 240 billion dollars importing health commodities. Even when money is available, access remains uncertain. We are making progress in local manufacturing. I welcome my friend Peter Sand and Global Fund's collaboration between the APPM and Wambo on efforts to secure affordable, high-quality African-made products.

Solidarity also requires responsibility. Why are we still not contributing the modest \$100,000 per country to operationalize the African Medicines Agency? Though regulation is not Africa CDC's mandate, we stepped in to support AMA, even paying for the past 8 months the salary of our staff covering the position of DG AMA till when the new DG gets her contract

thanks to your contributions. Africa CDC will remain steadfast in providing its support wherever it advances public health and strengthens the well-being of the African people.

Excellencies, financing remains our greatest challenge. In February 2025, President Kagame led a meeting bringing together 12 heads of State warning against ODA dependency and called for sovereignty that led to our vision: **Rethinking Africa Health Financing in a New Era**. This “Green Book” is the most comprehensive framework Africa has produced to reclaim ownership of its health systems. President John Mahama has since reinforced this message during the meeting that took place in Accra last month. Progress is made in several countries and in Zambia, we applaud the move from 7% in 2021 to 12% currently of the national budget dedicated to health. I’m glad to announce that President Kagame will soon convene a high-level meeting to accelerate action.

To support our countries, Africa CDC is advertising next week 10 Public Finance Management specialist positions to support national reforms in priority countries and supporting Lusaka Agenda is essential because financing is to serve Africa’s sovereignty though partner alignment rather than undermine it. Never again should Africa accept programs imposed outside our priorities.

Africa CDC is fully backing replenishment of **Gavi, Global Fund, Pandemic Fund, and Green Climate Fund**. I commend Gavi for its successful replenishment and for responding to Africa’s call through **Gavi Leap**, which respects national leadership. I thank my sister Sania Nishtar for her courage and vision that supports the Lusaka agenda.

Excellencies, peace and health are inseparable. Epidemics thrive in conflict. That is why Africa CDC worked to integrate health into the peace agreement for Eastern DRC. This will channel nearly **3 billion dollars** into investment in health security for the region, including Zambia. It proves that peace without health is fragile, and health without peace is unsustainable.

Our Heads of State have entrusted Africa CDC to be the Public Health Agency of Africa leading the agenda of PPPR, local manufacturing, and health financing among others. They have also appointed champions: President Ruto for manufacturing and reform, President Kagame for financing, President Ramaphosa for PPPR, President Tinubu for health workforce, and President Hichilema for cholera. These are not in symbolic roles, they are in actions but the truth is that champions can only succeed if Ministers of Health support that lead at national level because you are the custodians of policy and architects of health systems. Just months ago, President Hichilema convened a summit on cholera, and tomorrow he will launch the Continental Cholera Response Plan. Many thanks Your Excellency, this is true unity and solidarity in action.

Excellencies, Africa has the vision, the champions, the institutions, and the people. What we need is TRUE solidarity and TRUE unity. Our people demand us come together. Our history demands no less. And our future will forgive nothing less.

I thank you.



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