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# COMMUNIQUE OF THE HIGH-LEVEL EMERGENCY VIRTUAL MEETING OF AFRICAN MINISTERS OF HEALTH ON THE COVID-19 SITUATION IN AFRICA

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**African Ministers of Health  
endorsed an adapted strategy to  
fight COVID-19 underpinned by  
enhanced approaches to Prevent,  
Monitor, and Treat**

**We**, African Union (AU) Ministers of Health gathered virtually under the leadership of H.E Mr. Félix Antoine TSHISEKEDI Tshilombo, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Chair of the AU; H.E Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa and the AU COVID-19 Champion; and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC), H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2021 for a high level emergency meeting to evaluate the Africa Joint Continental Strategy on COVID-19 implementation status and discuss ways to adapt and improve our response strategy in light of the continuous threat posed by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

## PREAMBLE

**RECALLING** the Emergency Ministerial Meeting of 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2020 devoted to the COVID-19 under the theme *“Coordinated Actions to Prepare and Respond to COVID-19 infection in Africa”* that endorsed the Africa Joint Continental Strategy on COVID-19 and established the Africa Taskforce for Novel Coronavirus (AFTCOR), which is a continental platform to better coordinate our efforts across Africa.

**COGNIZANT** of the fact that COVID-19 continues to pose a serious threat to socio-economic and health security of Africa’s efforts to achieve its set goals of Agenda 2063.

**CONCERNED** about the rising morbidity and mortality caused so far by the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa; the negative impacts on physical, mental health, social well-being; negative impacts on economy; and the consequent exacerbation of inequalities within and between countries.

**INDIGNANT** at the fact that Africa faces severe delays to accessing life-saving vaccines for COVID-19 and may experience similar delays in accessing vaccines in future pandemics or outbreak situations.

**RECOGNIZING** the need for Africa to expand its ability to manufacture quality, safe, efficacious, and affordable diagnostics, therapeutics, medicines and vaccines, essential health technologies, to guarantee its health security needs.

**RECOGNIZING** the concerning situation with the emergence SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern and the impact on the efficacy of certain vaccines and the consequences on the ease of transmission of the virus.

**INSPIRED** by the launch today of the 4D partnership bringing together the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC); the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement Secretariat; the Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation; the Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy & Sustainable Environment; the Department of Economic Development, Trade, Industry & Mining, all organs and policy and technical arms of the African Union Commission to harness and enable a fuller appreciation of the socio-political determinants of health within the Agenda 2063.

**COGNISANT** of the fact that the 4D Partnership's success relies on the public-private linkages it fosters across the continental public sector, represented by the AU, and the private sector, as well as civil society institutions, at both national and regional levels in enriching the interactions among health, economics and security, thereby hastening the emergence of a new innovation-driven Public Health Order in Africa.

**ACKNOWLEDGING** the key leadership role of Africa CDC and the fundamental role of the Bureau of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government and AUC in catalysing and coordinating the comprehensive continental response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the central efforts of AU Member States.

**WELCOMES** the close collaboration between Africa CDC, World Health Organization (WHO), and partners that has supported countries to strengthen their capacity to prepare for and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic on the continent including: (1) scaling up of laboratory diagnosis, including subtyping and genome sequencing; (2) enhancing screening at entry points and surveillance as well as the use of a uniform COVID-Tech platform for Africa, (3) strengthening infection prevention and control measures, and (4) implementing the public health and social measures.

## THE HIGH-LEVEL MINISTERIAL MEETING:

**WELCOMES AND RECOGNIZES** the efforts by the Member States in response to COVID-19 pandemic.

**COMMENDS** the efforts of Africa CDC, WHO, partners, and AU Member States in working closely under the AFTCOR to coordinate our efforts across the continent.

**COLLECTIVELY ENDORSES** an adapted joint continental strategy with focus on enhanced **Prevention, Monitoring, and Treatment (PMT)** in order to meet the changing dimensions of the COVID-19 on the continent as well as the evolving nature of the global pandemic.

**CALLS UPON all Member States to intensify their efforts for** vaccination against COVID-19 as a critical component to prevent, contain and bring the pandemic to an end as quickly as possible.

**ALSO CALL UPON** AU Member States to take up their COVID-19 vaccine allocations through the African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team platform and engage with the African Export Import Bank to work out the details for the advance purchase agreement.

**UNDERSCORES** the need to protect schools and ensure schools remain open.

**ALSO UNDERSCORE the urgent need to protect other critical health programmes on the continent against the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These programmes including but not limited to HIV, TB, Malaria, and immunization efforts.**

**STRESSES** the need to understand the impact of vaccine impact and safety in the continent and **CALLS** on AU Members States to conduct surveillance for vaccine effectiveness and safety.

**ALSO WELCOMES** the United States of America's support for the World Trade Organization (WTO) waiver proposal and **ENCOURAGES** other countries to join the AU and the USA in making the right decision, by supporting the WTO TRIPS waiver.

**ACKNOWLEDGES** that the WTO waiver proposal is the first important step to expand manufacturing of COVID-19 related tools including vaccines, and a relevant initiative to ensure truly equitable access to vaccines, medicines and tools during the pandemic.

**ENCOURAGES** all countries, including those manufacturing vaccines and relevant COVID-19 tools, to fulfil the promise of vaccine equity, by ensuring that the WTO waiver is accompanied by the necessary and relevant transfer of technology and know-how to support and secure African manufacturing.

**ENDORSES** and supports the Africa Common Position on COVID-19 Passport, which calls for a global moratorium against the mandatory and unilateral imposition of COVID-19 vaccine requirements for international travel whilst encouraging the continued development of digital vaccine wallets and related technology tools, especially those based on the African Union *Trusted Vaccines* ([www.africacdc.org/trusted-vaccines](http://www.africacdc.org/trusted-vaccines)) toolkit, to maximise the benefits of vaccination to the African public.

**APPEALS** to all AU Member States to leverage harmonized continental digital technologies for the response to COVID-19, including for addressing its socioeconomic impact, paying particular attention to digital inclusion, patient empowerment, data privacy, and security, legal and ethical issues, and the protection of personal data, which are values enshrined in the official African Union Trusted Health framework, and its digital archetypes: the *Trusted Travel* ([www.africacdc.org/trusted-travel](http://www.africacdc.org/trusted-travel)) and *Trusted Vaccines* ([www.africacdc.org/trusted-vaccines](http://www.africacdc.org/trusted-vaccines)) platforms, provided at no cost to all member states to drive the digitization of their COVID-19 response efforts.

**SUPPORT** the mission of the 4D Partnership launched at this meeting among African Union Departments and organs to combine innovation-focused initiatives and technological systems; interconnect data streams; and build common electronic exchanges, repositories of algorithms and scientific models to address multiple developmental challenges that impinge on public health on the continent, such the interplay of genomics, diagnostic, mobility & genomic data in the tracking and prediction of pathogenic variants.

**FURTHER CALL UPON** partners to support Africa CDC, WHO, and AU Member States in the implementation of the adapted and endorsed Joint Continental Strategy and in strengthening their health systems to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in maintaining the safe provision of all other essential public health functions and services including combating TB, Malaria and other diseases.

**ALSO APPEALS** AU Member States to invest in acquiring data with appropriate security, and sharing of data in a timely fashion, to help support the continental response efforts against COVID-19, and to enable Africa CDC to better implement the continental strategy in response to COVID-19.

**FURTHER APPEALS** AU Member States to give a key role to in-country Africa CDC focal persons to contribute in the collection and timely exchange of data.

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