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OPENING STATEMENT BY

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**AT THE MEETING OF MINISTERS OF HEALTH AS
WORKING GROUP OF THE STC HPDC-1**

**SIPOPO CONFERENCE CENTER, MALABO,
EQUATORIAL GUINEA**

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PROTOCOL

Let me seize this opportunity to welcome you Honourable Ministers and country experts to a very important session, which focuses on a special subject of utmost significance to our Heads of State and the people of Africa.

The last two days of debates and our session here this morning, have been possible because of the exceptional generosity and warm hospitality of host.

My sincere gratitude and thanks, therefore and unreservedly, go to the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, His Excellency Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, the Government and People of Equatorial Guinea for this remarkable generosity.

Our presence here at this meeting of Ministers of Health as a Working Group of the Specialized Technical Committee on Health, Population and Drug Control (STC-HPDC1), is a proof of the significance we attached to the subject we are here to discuss. A subject our Heads of State, in their wisdom and foresightedness, have explicitly urged us, through various decisions, to prioritize and to ensure its establishment as soon as possible.

The Ebola outbreak and the fatal consequences that followed in its wake have made this mandate more urgent. That we have not set it up at the time stipulated by the Assembly, suggests our resolve and wisdom for due diligence and the need to drive and own the process as well as the institution as a true body of the continent geared towards reducing the disease burden, forestall outbreaks and ensure the wellbeing and prosperity of our people

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen.

When we met in Geneva in May this year during the World Health Assembly, we observed with keen interest the

pertinence and passion that marked the debate on the CDC. We took note of the common phrase of: *Festina Lente* (make haste slowly or hurry, hurry slowly) as an advice in the interest of all. That advice has brought us here and for two days, our experts painstakingly and relentlessly considered the various documents with the same passion and, to an extent, admirable patience and diligence. I am convinced that the work is almost done except for the political seal which we expect from our Honourable Ministers this afternoon as a mark of approval for the due diligence displayed by the experts.

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

“Time”, the adage goes, “does not wait for man”. And disease, we all know, is no respecter of persons and boundaries. Six months after our Heads of State mandated us at the Abuja Summit to set up the CDC, Ebola emerged in Guinea and later to Liberia and Sierra Leone with a pernicious rage unknown in the history of the virus. Few months later, it had reached Nigeria, Senegal and Mali and was about to have a global dimension. But thanks to the awareness, caution and preparedness induced in its aftermath.

Liberia for example was already Ebola free when we met in Geneva and Guinea and Sierra Leone were gradually moving towards zero. However, recent Ebola incidence in Liberia, the hike and fluctuations of figures in the two sister Republics, suggest that besides strengthening our health systems to tackle infectious diseases and public health emergencies, we must do everything possible to establish an Africa CDC that is robust and capable enough to-
“conduct lifesaving research on priority health problems...and to serve as a platform to share knowledge and build capacity in responding to public health emergencies and threats”

This call of the Heads of State must inspire us to move forward as procrastination will only leave us unprepared and uneven to confront future public health emergencies and threats.

To this end, Honourable Ministers, I graciously wish to implore you to rise up to the occasion of been the generation of Ministers who saw the signs of the times and Africa's disease burden and decided to protect and preserve the future by establishing a vigorous and efficient organization for the wellbeing, and future prosperity and security of the continent.

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me address one burning issue that featured prominently in our debates at the experts' level, and may be a subject of discussion during this session, which is **our cooperation with the WHO with regard to the establishment and operationalization of the Africa CDC.**

The two organizations, irrespective of institutional interests, capacity and organizational competencies, have convergent views when it comes to the wellbeing of the people of Africa. Realizing this, we have taken concrete steps to further strengthen our cooperation on continental health issues.

That cooperation with WHO, led to the First Joint Conference of African Ministers of Health in Luanda-Angola in April 2014. When we met in Brazzaville at the beginning of the current month, we looked at the various issues of our cooperation with the hope of taking it to a new level. We mapped out various areas of cooperation as well as looked at and agreed on how we as organizations working in the interest and wellbeing of the African people, could use our institutional capacity, competence and expertise to produce the requisite synergy for the effective operationalization of the Africa CDC.

Though the agreement is still work in progress, the principles of collaboration are, nonetheless explicit and mutually acceptable to the two organizations. It is in the spirit and scope of that cooperation that the WHO and the AU shall work together in the establishment and operationalization of the Africa CDC.

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me once again express my thanks and appreciation to the experts for the hard work, the passion, the patience and for the painstaking persistence and due diligence brought to bear in the consideration of the various documents. To the Government and people of Equatorial Guinea, our gratitude and appreciation are more than mere words. We exceedingly commend you for according us the appropriate facilities, enabling environment and warm hospitality to complete this enormous but worthwhile exercise.

I thank you.