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OPENING STATEMENT BY

**H.E. DR. MUSTAPHA S. KALOKO
COMMISSIONER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

**AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
AFRICA´S FIGHT AGAINST EBOLA PLENARY
AND FORUMS/SESSIONS ON HEALTH SYSTEMS
STRENGTHENING AND FINANCING**

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

20 JULY 2015

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Honorable Ministers of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea

Commissioner for Social Affairs

ECOWAS

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First and foremost, allow me, on behalf of the African Union Commission, to express my sincere thanks and profound appreciation to the Government of Equatorial Guinea for hosting this International Conference on Africa's Fight against Ebola, in this great and beautiful city of Malabo.

I wish also to convey to you the warm greetings from the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. She sends her best wishes for a successful and productive meeting.

Africa's people face a huge burden of preventable and treatable health problems. This triple burden includes communicable, non-communicable diseases (that include neglected diseases) and injury and trauma. We need to adequately address the socio-economic impact of these diseases in order to improve the wellbeing of our population.

However, although there are varied reasons of the high-disease burden in various countries on the continent epidemics continue to have a huge impact primarily due to under-resourced weak health system. There is thus an urgent need to increase investments in health in order to ensure reduction in disease burden and achieve to universal access.

Insufficient sustainable financial resources, inefficient allocation and use thereof, lack of social protection for the vulnerable groups especially those in catastrophic

situations are the key factors that need to be addressed. Furthermore the shortage of appropriately trained, motivated health workers and poor commodity security and supply systems further compound the challenges faced. Africa has to continue working hard to develop a viable pharmaceutical industry in Africa which shall not only impact on the African health system and its capacity to respond to the health needs of the people but also will contribute to the overall socioeconomic development of the continent. Moreover, it will also go a long way in saving the current costs incurred on commodities making up a huge proportion of the total cost of treatment and prevention of diseases.

While Africa has 13% of the world population, it bears 25% of the global disease burden and has only 3% of the global health work force. Migration of health workers to rich nations is draining human resources for health in poor countries. This is aggravated by the fact that Africa faces the emergence of new pandemics and resurgence of old diseases providing a further burden on the already overstretched health system.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the same time as it faces challenges, Africa is at a time of unique opportunities. This has the potential to significantly impact on its disease burden, notably through ensuring adequate investments in health systems. There is increasing recognition that health creates wealth and advances GDP. Since last year, the Ebola virus has killed thousands of people in the three West African countries: Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. This disease began silently spreading in a small village in Guinea on 26 December 2013, but was not identified until 21 March 2014. The outbreak of Ebola virus disease (EVD) in parts of West Africa is now the largest, longest, most severe and most complex in the nearly four-decade history of this disease.

The Ebola epidemic in West Africa has since destroyed lives, decimated communities, orphaning children at a rate not seen since the region's civil wars ended more than a decade ago. The uniqueness of this outbreak has highlighted the fragile health systems in the affected countries and the significant deficits in the human, financial and material resources needed for an effective and timely response to outbreaks.

For a country to deliver basic health care to its people, it requires a fully functional health system. There are many ingredients that make up a functional health system, including human resources for health, transport, ICT, facilities and medicines and supplies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Strong and effective health systems in the affected countries, supported by regional and global disease surveillance networks, are central to this endeavour. The immediate priority is to end the epidemic. It is also critical to address the adverse conditions that enabled a localized epidemic to escalate into national crises with serious regional and global response and to minimize the risk of its resurgence.

Experience from elsewhere suggests that, even after these countries stop the epidemic, the virus may remain latent in the region. As such, post-disaster recovery programmes must integrate systems and processes to ensure that disease surveillance is improved, health systems are reconstructed in a conflict-sensitive manner and that other relevant capacities including local are in place with appropriate levels of funding to sustain them over the medium and long term in order to minimize the risk of relapse into crisis. There is a need to work closely to share relevant experiences for the takeoff of the African Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (African CDC).

For this to happen, effective communication and information management and decentralized health delivery systems will be critical. In addition to the death and illness caused by Ebola, there has been an upsurge in mortality and morbidity from other diseases and conditions. This is linked to the collapse of health systems, with significantly eroded local capacities in critical areas. Our Member States shall explore the inclusion of social protection for the vulnerable and a plan to protect families from the long term debt traps of catastrophic illness or injury with the perspective to reach universal health coverage.

There is need to review user fees to be taken into account in the National Health Plans.

Strengthening capacity is also important for other sectors such as education, water, sanitation and hygiene promotion, nutrition, child protection and broader social and humanitarian protection that offer financial security and social welfare. These sectors are key to strengthening the resilience of communities in the medium term and long term.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Health funding in most African countries is below what is required to achieve a functional, basic health system, and to end the scourge of these human security threats affecting our continent. There are substantial unfunded needs beyond the domestic ability to pay. There is need for new initiatives to diversify funding sources like boosting private sector commitments and increased global partnership and solidarity to ensure these needs are met. Business as usual will not bring an end to the impacts of these diseases or improve the wellbeing of our population. It will merely prolong them for another generation while bringing a negative impact to the economy and growth.

We call for a greater support for recovery efforts for the three-affected countries, including ensuring the resilience of health systems to enable them to respond to outbreaks and other humanitarian emergencies, as well as to continue dealing with non-Ebola health issues.

God Bless Africa.

I thank you.