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ZERO Draft _20/02/15

First Revised Draft 10/04/15

Second Revised Draft 10/05/15

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AFRICA'S FIGHT AGAINST EBOLA

“Africa helping Africans in the Ebola Recovery and Reconstruction”

Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

20 – 21 July 2015

CONCEPT NOTE

I. Background

Ebola is a highly fatal virus. The first human outbreak occurred in 1976, one in northern Zaire (now DRC) in Central Africa: and the other, in southern Sudan (now South Sudan). Deadly human Ebola outbreaks have been confirmed in the following countries: Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Gabon, South Sudan, Côte-d'Ivoire, Uganda, Republic of Congo, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Senegal, Liberia and Mali.

The first cases of Ebola in West Africa are believed to have occurred in December 2013, in Guinea yet with scarce surveillance and laboratory capacities, it was not until four months later, on March 21, 2014, that a confirmed case was actually reported. The outbreak of Ebola virus disease in parts of West Africa is the largest, longest, most severe, and most complex in the nearly four-decade history of this disease.

This was West Africa's first real experience with the virus, and it delivered some horrific shocks and surprises. The entry of Ebola into other countries via infected air travellers was also unprecedented. Exceptionally mobile populations moving across exceptionally porous borders infected new areas, re-infected others, and eluded contact tracing teams. Health systems, already weakened during years of civil war and unrest, collapsed under the weight of this disease. The disease was unexpected and unfamiliar to everyone, from physicians and laboratory staff to governments and their citizens. Ebola preyed on fear of the unfamiliar.

Stemming from a tapestry of socio-cultural beliefs, what began as an epidemic outbreak quickly escalated into a humanitarian, social, economic, and security crisis. Schools, markets, businesses, airlines, shipping routes, and borders closed. Tourism shut down, further deepening the blow to struggling economies. Countries resorted to using their defense and military forces for the command and control of containment measures. Factors of culture, history, geography, and poorly constructed roads and weak compromised infrastructure collapsed and arbitrary insurgence of Ebola outbreak. Cultural and other factors create major barriers: mistrust, stigma, superstition, traditional practices in the treatment of the ill, and washing and burial of the dead.

Notably, extraordinary response, primarily by people in communities living with the outbreak was witnessed. Seeing individuals suffering has been distressing, but at the same time it has been encouraging to see how local communities, governments in the affected countries, and the international community at the highest possible level have come together to stop the outbreak. On 8 August, WHO formally designated the Ebola outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. As of 30th April 2015, the World Health Organization (WHO) mentioned almost 25 000 reported confirmed, probable, and suspected cases of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, with over 10 000 reported deaths, making as the world's largest Ebola outbreak in history.

Inspired by a the pioneering spirit of African Solidarity Initiative (ASI) with the spirit of Africa helping Africa, the African Union has since been spearheading continental efforts to respond to the epidemic and on-going efforts include high level advocacy, mobilization of financial resources and the deployment of medical and other personnel to affected countries. Recognized as African novel and noble initiative, the African Union Support to Ebola in West Africa (ASEOWA) epitomizes the spirit of ASI. To this end ASI is predicated on African values as an initiative whose time has come and one that could further unlock African potential and complement efforts by development partners. Hence the African conference on Ebola recovery and reconstruction resonates with the spirit of Inter-African Convention on Technical Cooperation signed in 1975 to see ***“Africa helping Africa”***

The Peace and Security Council of the African Union, at its 450th meeting held in Addis Ababa, on 19 August 2014 invoked Article 6(f) relating to aspects of its mandate with regard to humanitarian action and disaster management and decided that “given the emergency situation caused by the Ebola outbreak, to authorize the immediate deployment of an AU-led Military and Civilian Humanitarian Mission, comprising medical doctors, nurses and other medical and paramedical personnel, as well as military personnel, as required for the effectiveness and protection of the Mission”. At the peak of the epidemic, ASEOWA deployed to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, about 835 African volunteer health workers with a target of 1000. These efforts have been commended by the Heads Of State and Government (HOSG) in their January 2015 Summit in Addis Ababa **Assembly/AU/Dec.553(XXIV) and Assembly/AU/Decl.4(XXIV)**, while expressing concern on the lives lost including the health workers as well as the socio economic impact.

Africa with support from the international actors has managed to turn the Ebola challenge into an opportunity. After months of extra-ordinary effort by the governments and people of the three affected countries, and partners the tide has turned against the epidemic. Cases are clearly declining in all three countries, although the road to zero new infections remains bumpy. Indeed, **Liberia reached zero on 27 March 2015 when the last confirmed case was buried and on 9 May 2015, the country was officially declared Ebola free by the WHO. The optimistic projection is that Sierra Leone and Guinea would approach zero new infections by August 2015 when ASEOWA mandate will end.**

The epidemic abates but certain sectors may require specific assistance for recovery and reconstruction. Momentum must be sustained to guard against complacency and donor fatigue. Emerging from ravaging conflicts and political instability, the three affected countries cannot mount recovery and reconstruction programmes of their economies alone, but with Africa taking a lead and international community walking side-by-side with them greater trades can be achieved.

Continuing with the gallant **“Africa helping Africa”**, spirit of African solidarity, pivotal moment is upon Africa to institute recovery and reconstruction mechanism with a view to address huge economic and societal havoc that Ebola is causing in the region. Central to this effort are modalities for rebuilding of health systems and enhanced disease surveillance to be crafted in tandem with the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC)

So far a strategy to contain and eradicate the epidemic has been mapped out by each government with the support of WHO and other key partners. All actors need to be reminded that eradication remains the principle objective and that their effort, be it financial or in kind, must be both adaptable to new needs and sustained until the outbreak is eradicate. Compounding this scenario is the nature of the scope of recovery and reconstruction of the socio-economic systems of Ebola affected countries, which is fairly intricate and requires novel, and innovative approaches as well as substantial resources. This points Africa to one proverbial direction of galvanizing a united front in solidarity culminating to Ebola affected countries emerging victoriously from the devastating socio-economic impact of Ebola outbreak.

It is in this context that the African Union Commission is organizing the **International Conference on Africa’s fight against Ebola**, under the theme: **“Africa helping Africans in the Ebola Recovery and Reconstruction”** which was called by the AU HOSG in their decision **Assembly/AU/Dec. 553(XXIV)**. The conference will bring together relevant and various stakeholders to share experiences in the fight against Ebola and to discuss the post Ebola recovery and reconstruction. There will be a focus on investment in public health, strengthening health systems and response to disease outbreaks in order to achieve sustainable socio-

economic recovery and reconstruction of the affected countries, in particular and West Africa region in general.

In line with the decision of the Assembly, the international conference will be organized in Equatorial Guinea from **20 to 21 July 2015** by the AUC, in collaboration with Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Equatorial Guinea, as well as ECOWAS and the Mano River Union. The conference on Ebola has strong propensity to provide an opportunity for Africa to take action and progress towards achieving robust national health systems that are adequately staffed and financed, that are resilient to shocks and health threats, and that are able to reach all people with good quality preventive and curative services. Within this, is the opportunity for analyzing concomitant approaches for better preparedness to confront and deal with outbreaks of communicable and non-communicable diseases as well as other public health emergencies.

II. General Objective:

The conference will bring together high level multi-sectoral leadership including Heads of State and Government, Ministers, and Africa's Captains of Industries and Partners to share experiences in the fight against Ebola, the lessons learned and commit to assisting the Ebola-affected countries in their recovery and reconstruction efforts as well as in the prevention of future public health outbreak on the continent.

Specific Objectives

- a. Mobilize African and international support (including financial support) for recovery and reconstruction of three Ebola affected countries in the context of Africa helping Africa
- b. Mobilize stakeholders at all levels including private sector to support and strengthen actions against the Ebola epidemic as well as the preparedness and response to all emerging and reemerging health threats in Africa;
- c. To identify the sectors where the consequences of the epidemic present urgent problems and require urgent solutions;
- d. Reinforce the link between health research and intervention actions to better coordinate the response against Ebola and other major emerging endemic diseases in Africa;
- e. Capitalize on the experiences from the current EVD and come up with lessons learned and best practices for a more effective fight against Ebola and other major endemic diseases, as well as preparedness and the response against future outbreaks;
- f. Develop advocacy to support resource mobilization, public awareness and preventive measures for post Ebola recovery and reconstruction of Ebola affected countries and the continent;
- g. Generating support for the African Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (African CDC)

III. Expected outputs

- a. The meeting is expected to address the specific objectives with the valuable contributions of the multi sectorial experts and to come up with a clear way forward for the establishment of a global policy and strategic framework for an effective response against EVD and others major endemic diseases Africa culminating to sustainable recovery and reconstruction.
- b. Mobilizing financial and material support for the recovery and reconstruction of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

- c. The conference should also come out with strong commitments for resource mobilization to sustain diseases control mechanisms including the Africa CDC, as well as strengthening health system to respond better to major Health threats

IV. Participants

The meeting will be attended by Heads of State and Government, Ministers of Health, Ministers of Finance and Planning, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Affected Countries, ECOWAS (as a principal co-organizer with the AUC), CSOs, UN Agencies, AfDB, Partner Organizations involved in response against the EVD, Scientists, Researchers, Policy Makers and the AU Organs.

V. Structure/Organization of the Conference

The main Conference will be from 20-21 July 2015 with Side Events/Exhibitions on 19 July 2015 and will be organized as follows:

Side Events and Exhibitions - 19 July 2015:

The Conference will be preceded on 19 July 2015 by CSO Forum, Exhibitions, Side Events such as Vaccine and Clinical Trials, Testing, Treatment of Ebola, etc.)

Day One: 20 July 2015: Plenary and Three Forums

Morning:

- i. Opening Plenary Session at Ministerial Level: Affected countries will present their experiences and recovery plans in Plenary
- ii. Forum I: Health system strengthening (Ministers of Health plus Partners)
- iii. Forum II: Financing (Ministers of Finance and Planning plus Partners)

Afternoon:

- iv. Forum IV: African Private sector plus the Ebola affected countries

Day Two: 21 July 2015: Plenary for Heads of State & Government to be divided into parts:

Morning/Afternoon:

- a) Statements by HOSG, maximum time will be five minutes. Statements will be limited to only Presidents, Prime ministers and Vice Presidents. Other Heads of Delegations will submit the statements for circulation. Register for Speakers will be opened before the Conference
- b) Donations and Contributions in cash and kind

VI. Dates, Venue and Language

The meeting will take hold 20 – 21 July 2015, in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. The venue of the meeting will be communicated in due course. The meeting will be conducted in both in English and French.

VII. Logistics

The AUC will not cover the costs associated with Member States' and partner's participation and therefore requests all member states and partners to meet their costs. All participants are requested to obtain visa from the Equatorial Guinea Embassy in their respective countries. Visa on arrival will be arranged for participants from countries that do not have at the Equatorial Guinea embassy. Participants are further requested to make their own hotel bookings.

VIII. Further Information

Additional information could be obtained from:

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