The Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Quartey Thomas Kwesi, today announced a new African Union initiative under the auspices of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) - the Kofi Annan Global Health Leadership Programme - in memory of the late Kofi Atta Annan, seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and founding chair of the Kofi Annan Foundation.

In April 2001, Kofi Annan, then Secretary-General, stood before Heads of State and Government of Africa at the African Summit on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Other Infectious Diseases in Abuja, Nigeria, and proposed a global AIDS fund. He said, “This is a conference about Africa’s future,” before unveiling his action plan to fight the pandemic.

H.E. Quartey Kwesi recalled Kofi Annan’s strong devotion to ending Africa’s chronic epidemics. He remembered him saying: “AIDS has become not only the primary cause of death on this continent, but one of the biggest development challenges”. Kofi Annan went further to push for a ‘war chest’ to fight AIDS and other major infectious diseases that particularly affect Africa, a dream he lived to see fulfilled.

“In 2014 when the Ebola epidemic struck in West Africa, Kofi Annan publicly called for the establishment of an African institution that would focus on disease prevention and control on the continent. Today, Africa CDC, an institution of the African Union, plays a leading role in shaping Africa’s response to COVID-19. The Kofi Annan Foundation is deeply gratified that its founder is being honoured with the establishment of this Global Leadership Programme at Africa CDC. It is an important initiative that will advance our founder’s vision for a healthy Africa,” said El Hadj As Sy, Chairman, Board of Kofi Annan Foundation.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how greatly interconnected Africa and the rest of the world are in several aspects. The continent will need to be better prepared for health challenges of the 21st century. The Kofi Annan Global Health Leadership Programme is intended to create the kind of public health leadership that
will be critically needed to harness the incredible human capital potential that exists in Africa. Such emerging leadership will be vital in galvanizing a new public health order for the continent to meet the 21st century challenges.

“We are moved that our beloved late husband and father is being honoured by the African Union in naming its premiere global health leadership programme after him. He was a visionary leader who also used all he had to ensure realization of his dreams. Seeing the devastation by HIV/AIDS, he threw himself into a response that led to the birth of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. He had a strong belief in Africa and would have approved this initiative,” said a representative of the Kofi Annan family.

“The world will always remember an iconic global statesman, who, besides his tireless efforts for peace and justice, was also one of the greatest global health leaders of our time. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria is undoubtedly part of his legacy,” said Peter Piot, former Executive Director of UNAIDS and currently Director of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, U.K.

He said, “I have made the battle against it (AIDS) my personal priority”, and boldly called for billions of dollars at a time when we were still struggling to find millions, and the prevailing wisdom at the time was that billions were just not available, and antiretroviral therapy in low-income countries was not possible and was too expensive. He fully deserves to be honored in this manner by Africa CDC,” added Peter Piot.

“Africa CDC is honoured that the Kofi Annan family and foundation has accepted the naming of the newly established Global Health Leadership Programme after the distinguished former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Nobel Laureate and son of Africa. We truly hope that the Programme will help groom public health leaders to be as visionary as Mr. Annan was” said H.E. Amira Elfadil Mohamed Elfadil, Commissioner of Social Affairs at the African Union Commission.

The Africa CDC Kofi Annan Global Health Leadership Programme has been built on three components: (1) A Public Health Leadership Fellow Programme, (2) A Public Health Scholar Programme, and (3) A Public Health Virtual Leadership Academy.

The Public Health Leadership Fellow Programme will equip emerging and established public health leaders with the skills required to become more effective in initiating innovative, bold, visionary but implementable African-owned solutions to address disease threats and challenges in the 21st century.

The Public Health Scholar Programme will support the placement of experienced public health experts within National Public Health Institutes and Ministries of Health to enable strategic leadership, mentorship, and policy development.

The Public Health Virtual Leadership Academy will become the continent’s leading digital “think tank” platform to democratise the search for new insights and solutions for African public health needs. The Academy shall create the much-needed nexus between the health threats and economics, finance, innovative technology, gender, security and human rights.
Commenting on the launch of the Global Health Leadership Programme, H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of Nigeria and co-panellist with Kofi Annan on the Africa Progress Panel, and co-Patron of Afro Champions, said: “Africa has no excuse anymore to be timid in making clear its desire to become a global player in a new public health order that will emerge from this crisis. All that remains is the collective impatience. I am happy that the AU and the Africa CDC have lighted a spark of urgency with this initiative in memory of a great African who did so much for the continent’s health”

“Africa is a resilient continent, but we need stronger health systems and institutions that can support communities to become more resilient. The Kofi Annan Global Health Leadership is a visionary programme that will help advance the tremendous potential that exist within the public health systems of the continent. This will enable them to embrace a multidimensional approach that will be critically required to tackle disease threats in a globalized world. Africa CDC welcomes this very important programme especially at such a time that the world is fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and advancing the Continental Free Trade Agreement,” said Dr John Nkengasong, Director of Africa CDC.

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