



## **OPENING SPEECH**

**BY**

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**AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

**ROLL OUT OF COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAM**

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**MELES ZENAWI BUILDING, AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**



**Excellences, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Good morning.**

On behalf of the African Union Commission and on my personal behalf, I would like to welcome you all to the Rolling Out of the COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAM.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted almost every corner of our life, causing global economies to stall, changing the way we work and interact with our loved ones, and stretching healthcare systems to their limits. Governments around the world have been forced to implement harsh restrictions on human activity to curb the spread of the virus.

We have been following all preventive measures as advised by public health experts like wearing of masks, frequent washing of hands and physical distancing and still we are not there.

COVID-19 vaccination is now offering a way to transition out of this phase of the pandemic. Without them, natural herd immunity will not be able to sufficiently restore society to its normal status quo and that it would have resulted in extreme fatality.



Fortunately, the beginning of 2021 saw numerous vaccines given emergency approval and begin their roll out in countries across the world. As of March 2021, over 300 million vaccine doses had been administered worldwide. The figures give hope of a return to 'normal' although for Africa, with about 20 million of citizens vaccinated, there is still some catch up to do.

**Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is clear that vaccines will allow society to get back to 'normal' and for restrictions to be permanently eased.

Getting vaccinated, you are breaking the chain of the spread, you reduce the mutations (Variants), you protect others and even if you get sick the severity of disease is minimal not requiring hospital admission.

Health Care Workers and Public Health Experts have another task of educating people as this helps to build trust in the decision to offer vaccinations, without which, the world will not be able to overcome the pandemic and return to 'normal' life.

**Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

All vaccines and medicines carry a risk of side effects as all of them are contrary to nature. In this case, the risks of severe disease and death from COVID-19 are many times higher than the very small risks related to the vaccine.

We continue to appeal to all people to please, be careful. It is fact that **vaccines give us light at the end of the tunnel, but we're not there yet.**

The vaccines are only one of the many tools we have to prevent infections and save lives. The right approach is a comprehensive approach.

We must all continue to protect ourselves and those around us by making the right choices.

### **Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This COVID-19 Vaccination Roll Out with Astra Zeneca would have not been possible without the close collaboration between the African Union Commission and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Health through The Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Allow me, on behalf of the African Union community, to extend our sincere gratitude to the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

I am informed that you will continue to use Astra Zeneca and the arrival of Johnson and Johnson in the near future, as well as others as they get emergency approval will complement the existing one. Everyone above 55 years of age, Health Care Workers, those with underlying medical conditions, and front liners will be eligible in the first phase and gradually you will move to other age groups but the target I am told is to vaccinate everyone.

### **Excellences, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen**

At this junction, I would like to declare the start of this vaccination program to All AUC Staff and Diplomats in the AU Permanent Representative Missions and their dependents respectively.

I thank you very much for everything you have done as a team and you continue to do so because this is just the start of the long journey until the COVID-19 is defeated.