THE INAUGURAL CONFERENCE ON PUBLIC HEALTH IN AFRICA 2021

OPENING STATEMENT BY H.E. MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT,

14 DECEMBER 2021
Excellencies Heads of State and Government,  
H.E Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the African Union Commission, I would like to welcome all of you joining us from across the African continent and around the world. The inaugural Conference on Public Health in Africa is happening at an important moment in history and I am honored to speak with you today about how we can work together to achieve Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want.

I want to start by thanking all African Union Members States and Leaders; as well as the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) under the leadership of Dr John Nkengasong for their extraordinary leadership in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic over the past two years. The African continent has not been spared from the devastating effects due to COVID-19. Many have fallen sick, pushing our health systems to their limits. The economic damage caused by COVID-19 has left many jobless, hungry and vulnerable. And the effects on the global economy, on health security, and on sustainable development cannot be overstated.

Despite this, we have great hopes for the future. COVID-19 has also created a historic opportunity to build a new public health order that can effectively guard against future health crises. And this inaugural
Conference on Public Health in Africa is a first step in making this a reality.

The Africa CDC and African Union have created this conference to provide a unique platform that brings together the best and brightest minds in public health in Africa to gather in service of this larger goal. Over the coming days, we will hear experts from across the continent and beyond weigh in on topics that are vital to Africa’s continued prosperity and improved health status.

We will learn about the epidemiology, prevention and management of COVID-19, as well as other infectious diseases threatening our continent. We will hear about the state of COVID-19 vaccination in Africa, and how we might prepare for what’s next. We will discuss what an equitable approach to health systems might look like; and how we can leverage the best available evidence to fulfill this goal. We will bring together the ‘whole of society’ to highlight the critical roles that the private sector, civil society and communities play in building this brighter future. Together, we will create a new benchmark for collective effort and participation as we advance public health and practice, education, training, and research in Africa, for Africa.

Lastly, to achieve this new public health order, we must strengthen our partnerships and collaborations to chart a course for our own future – a future of self-reliance. I would like to assure you today that
African Union Commission stands firm in our resolve to bolster manufacturing capacity for vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics; to build resilient health systems capable of detecting future health threats; and to build financing mechanisms that allow Member States to respond efficiently and effectively to the health needs of the continent.

We learn best by looking back, so that we can move forward. Thank you all for reflecting with us over the coming days as we continue in this fight against one of the deadliest pandemics of our time. We look forward to engaging you all as we collectively chart the way forward for Africa.

I thank you for your attention.