

# COMMUNIQUE BY THE EMERGENCY MEETING OF AFRICAN MINISTERS OF HEALTH ON **THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE OUTBREAK**

## **“Coordinated actions to prepare and respond to COVID-19 infection in Africa”**

**We**, African Union Ministers of Health and Heads of Delegation gathered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on the 22 February 2020 for an emergency meeting on the ongoing outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

### **PREAMBLE**

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**RECALLING** the Heads of State and Government’s Declaration in July 2013 at the African Union Special Summit on HIV, TB and Malaria in Abuja, Nigeria, in which African leaders recognized the need for an Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) to conduct life-saving research on priority health problems and to serve as a platform to share knowledge and build capacity in responding to public health emergencies and threats in Africa.

**CONSIDERING** the African Union Assembly in 2014 devoted to responding to the Ebola outbreak, African leaders formally endorsed an accelerated timeline to launch the Africa CDC, together with the five Regional Centres.

**FURTHER CONSIDERING** that Africa CDC was launched in January 2017 and established as a specialized technical institution of the Union with the responsibility of promoting the prevention and control of diseases in Africa.

**ACKNOWLEDGING** that any potential spread of COVID-19 on the continent is a social, economic, and security threat for the continent. Further, taking into consideration that the African Union Agenda 2063, which is a strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of the continent over the next 50 years, will be severely disrupted by disease outbreaks such as the COVID-19 if there are no measures for timely coordination, collaboration, and communication.

**COGNIZANT** of the severe risk that COVID-19 can undermine Africa's efforts in achieving its goals in the context of "Silencing the guns by 2020: creating conducive environment for Africa's Development", as adopted by the Heads of State and Government for the year 2020.

**COGNIZANT** that any potential COVID-19 spread in Africa would be devastating in light of the multiple health challenges that Africa already faces, which include: (1) rapid population growth leading to increased population movement across the continent and the world; (2) existing endemic diseases such as HIV, TB, and malaria, emerging infectious pathogens, and the ascendance of antimicrobial resistance; (3) increasing incidence of non-communicable diseases and injuries; (4) persistently high maternal mortality rates; (5) threats posed by environmental toxins; and (6) fragile health infrastructure, with limited resilient to numerous disease outbreaks.

**RECALLING** the 29th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 3 to 4 July 2017; in which they expressed deep concern about the increasing recurrence of epidemics on our continent and their enormous socio-economic impact, as well as the inadequate implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005). As such they committed to:

- i. Accelerate implementation of the International Health Regulation (IHR) at national, provincial and local levels with a clear road map and monitoring mechanisms;
- ii. Institute multi-sectorial mechanisms to accelerate the implementation of IHR; and
- iii. Mobilize the necessary resources to implement the road maps for acceleration of implementation of IHR.

**ALSO RECALLING** the World Health Organization's (WHO) role in managing IHR capacity development in Member States.

**NOTING** the duty and political mandate of National Public Health Institutes to respond to public health emergencies that have been declared Public Health Emergencies of International Concern (PHEIC), working in partnership with WHO and all relevant stakeholders;

**ALSO NOTING** the strong evidence that health security depends on the establishment of resilient and adaptive national health systems, with a clearly defined public health coordination mechanism;

**FURTHER NOTING** the implementation of the Collaborative Arrangements for the Prevention and Management of Public Health Events in Civil Aviation (CAPSCA) programme as an International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) programme to assist in the development of preparedness plans and respond to public health events that could affect the aviation sector.

**CONSCIOUS** of the fact that the COVID-19 outbreak was declared a PHEIC by the WHO on 30 January 2020 and has infected over 75,000 persons in China and a further 2000 in 26 other countries of which over 2000 have died globally.

**NOTING** that the first case of COVID-19 in Africa has been reported in the Arab Republic of Egypt.

**WELCOMING** the efforts by the Member States in response to COVID-19 outbreak.



## THE MINISTERIAL MEETING

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**COLLECTIVELY** agrees to prepare for and potentially respond to COVID-19 importation to Africa.

**COMMEND** the efforts of Africa CDC to rapidly establish the Africa Taskforce for Novel Coronavirus (AFTCOR), which is a continental platform to better coordinate our efforts across Africa.

**WELCOME** the close collaboration between Africa CDC, ICAO, and WHO in supporting countries to strengthen their capacity to prepare for and eventually respond to any potential cases of COVID-19 on the continent including: (1) scaling up of laboratory diagnosis; (2) enhancing screening at entry points and surveillance, and (3) strengthening infection prevention and control measures.

**ENDORSE** and support Africa CDC's guidance, in collaboration with WHO, for coordination, assessment, monitoring, and movement restrictions of people at risk of COVID-19.

**ALSO ENDORSE** a regional collaborative approach to implement a continent-wide strategy using the Africa CDC Regional Collaborating Centres (RCCs), in partnership with WHO.

**SUPPORT AFTCOR** as an innovative approach to strengthen coordination, communication, and collaboration among Member States in preparedness and eventual response to COVID-19 epidemic, including cross-border detection and control.

**ENDORSE** the following pillars of AFTCOR: (1) Enhanced surveillance; (2) Laboratory testing and subtyping; (3) Risk communication and community engagement; (4) Logistics and supply chain management; (5) Infection prevention and control; and (6) Case management;

**ENHANCE** surveillance and points of entry screening for COVID-19, including air, land and sea ports in collaboration with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and other relevant stakeholders.

**ENSURE** effective risk communication and community engagement to empower the public by sharing accurate, appropriate and timely information regarding COVID-19 and by continuously monitoring, engaging, and releasing targeted campaigns on multiple social media channels in major African languages.

**DEVELOP** and finance strategic plans for national preparedness based on Member States' needs and in alignment with the global WHO Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP).

**PARTNER** and collaborate with relevant stakeholders and the private sector to support the development of strategic plans for COVID-19 preparedness and response, including developing and/or strengthening functional National Public Health Institutes/Agencies in Africa to respond to future emerging infections/diseases on the continent, taking into consideration the IHR guidelines.

**HARNESS** the regional resources and stockpile critical medical supplies, including laboratory materials and personal protective equipment on the continent.

**COLLABORATE** with the relevant authorities of national governments and the Chinese Government to monitor and assure the health situation of our citizens resident in China.

**HARMONISE** response measures by creating standard operating procedures and policies for readiness and response.

**CALL UPON** the African Union Commission, donors and partners to support Africa's efforts to coordinate its preparedness and response plan for COVID-19.



**Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), African Union Commission**

Roosevelt Street W21 K19, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

+251 11 551 7700

[africacdc@africa-union.org](mailto:africacdc@africa-union.org)

[www.africacdc.org](http://www.africacdc.org)

[africacdc](https://www.facebook.com/africacdc)

[@AfricaCDC](https://twitter.com/AfricaCDC)