



COMMUNIQUE OF AU BUREAU ON COVID-19 RESPONSE

H.E. President Félix Antoine Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Chairperson of the African Union (AU) convened a teleconference meeting of the AU Bureau of Heads of State and Government on 24 June 2021, to discuss the African response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following members of the Bureau participated in the teleconference meeting: H.E. Prime Minister Moustafa Madbouly of the Arab Republic of Egypt; H.E. President Azali Assoumani of the Comoros; H.E. President Cyril Ramaphosa of the Republic of South Africa and AU COVID-19 Champion; H.E. President Macky Sall of the Republic of Senegal; H.E. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, and H.E. Mr Moussa Faki Mahamat. The Director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), Dr John Nkengasong, also participated in the teleconference.

The Heads of State and Government present listened with concern to the reports on COVID-19 on the African continent as presented by H.E. President Cyril Ramaphosa, AU COVID-19 Champion, and Dr John Nkengasong. At the time of the reports, the AU Member States have reported over 5.2m cases and over 138k deaths from COVID-19. A third wave of the disease is underway on the continent, with the large majority of cases occurring in the Southern region. Since mid-May, the number of new cases per day has increased more than 2.5 times; 53 (96 per cent) of the Member States have experienced a second wave, which, in 75 per cent of those countries, has been more severe than the first. In addition, 19 (35 per cent) of the Member States have experienced a third wave, which for 10 (53 per cent) has proven more severe than previous ones. One Member State is currently experiencing the third wave of the virus.

H.E. President Cyril Ramaphosa went on to present the newly-founded Commission on African COVID-19 Response. The Commission, which the President chairs with Dr John Nkengasong as deputy, held its inaugural meeting on 22 June 2021. The Commission's overarching goal is to support President Cyril Ramaphosa in his Championship role to enable his continued leadership role in guiding the continental response to COVID-19. The Commission's mandate is two-fold: 1) identify gaps in the continental COVID-19 response strategy and propose evidence-based interventions within the scope of practice of the Commission, and 2) generate evidence to assess the impact of COVID-19 on social and economic harm on the continent and propose ways to a strong recovery. Members of the Commission represent a cross-section of society,

including civil society, academia, the continental scientific community, the public health sector, the medical fraternity, the private sector, and development finance institutions.

The Heads of State and Government present fully supported the establishment and mandate of the Commission. They commended the exemplary leadership of President Cyril Ramaphosa. They also commended the stewardship of Dr John Nkengasong in leading the continental response to the pandemic.

The Bureau of the Heads of State and Government further expressed concerns about the rising morbidity and mortality caused so far by the third wave and fourth waves of the pandemic in the Member States and the limited access to COVID-19 vaccines on the continent. At the time of the meeting, only 1.12 per cent of the African population have been fully vaccinated.

In light of these developments, the Bureau of the Heads of State and Government endorsed the revised Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak. The revised strategy focuses on enhanced Prevention, Monitoring, and Treatment, which reflects the changing dimensions of the COVID-19 on the continent as well as the evolving nature of the pandemic.

The Bureau of the Heads of State and Government further endorsed the outcomes of the virtual summit on “Expanding Africa’s Vaccine Manufacturing for Health Security”, held from 12-13 April 2021. These outcomes include the “Framework for Action” with key milestones towards reaching the target of manufacturing 60 per cent of Africa’s routine immunisation needs on the continent by 2040, aligned with the call for a New Public Health Order. They also include the launch of the Partnerships for African Vaccine Manufacturing (PAVM), which aims to leverage pan-African and global partnerships to scale up vaccine manufacturing in Africa.