

**ACT-Accelerator Facilitation Council Briefing, 22 September 2021**

**Opening remarks, Dr Mathume Joseph Phaahla,**

**Minister of Health for South Africa**

- Thank you Minister Ulstein.
- When we put into perspective what the inequity in vaccine coverage means for the global south – the situation is even more dire.
- In Africa, where more than 17% of the world resides, we have received less than 2% of the total amount of vaccines administered. And to put this in deeper context, of all the WHO regions this past week, only the African continent had a 7 percent increase in COVID-19 related deaths.
- How can we explain this picture when the world has the tools, resources and avenues to address these inequities?
- We can no longer stand by and watch while Africa, and low and middle-income countries are placed at the back of the line in terms of access to essential COVID-19 tests, vaccines, treatments including Oxygen.
- Our meeting today is not a time for just “talk” but it is an opportunity to see the stark reality and to take the necessary actions to tackle what we are facing now and what lies in the months ahead in terms of what resources are available and how it can reach those who need them most.
- It is also a time where we can reflect on the role of ACT-A and begin to chart the course for its central role in helping the global community get to the target of 70% vaccination coverage by mid-next year. A goal that is important for all of us to begin the road to social and economic recovery out of the pandemic that has changed all of our lives.
- Yet that will not be possible, if we do not continue to collectively push for swapping near-term vaccine delivery schedules with COVAX and the African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team (AVATT), for companies to be released from contracts to enable prioritization of deliveries to COVAX and AVATT, for countries to fully operationalize their donation commitments and to work in concert to support expansion of vaccine manufacturing in Africa, the Caribbean and other regions.
- This is not all that is required – but it is a start. There is still a lot of work to be done.
- I urge you, to go into these discussions today with a renewed sense of urgency in the mission to get equitable access to COVID-19 tools to all people that requires them. Many people are dying, they cannot wait for us to conclude talks - now is the time for action

- Thank you and I will now hand over the Chairing of this meeting to the Co-Chairs of the Technical Team our colleagues Professor Olive Shisana, the President's Special Advisor on Social Policy, South Africa and John-Arne Røttingen, Ambassador for Global Health, Norway, to take us through the sessions of our meeting.
- Olive, over to you to chair the first session of this meeting.