KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH, HONOURABLE ALEX SEGBEFIA AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE AFRICA TECHNICAL CONSULTATION ON THE GLOBAL STRATEGY ON HUMAN RESOURCES FOR HEALTH WORKFORCE 2030 HELD AT THE MENSVIC GRAND HOTEL ON JULY 8, 2015

MR. CHAIRMAN
THE WHO COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVE IN GHANA
THE DIRECTOR OF HEALTH WORKFORCE DEPARTMENT, WHO HEADQUARTERS
THE DIRECTOR OF HEALTH SYSTEMS & SERVICES CLUSTER IN WHO AFRICA REGIONAL OFFICE
THE REPRESENTATIVES OF AFRICAN MINISTRIES OF HEALTH HERE PRESENT
PARTNER REPRESENTATIVES
THE MEDIA
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

It is my honour and pleasure to be delivering the keynote address at the opening of this important consultation forum on the global strategy on human resource for health workforce. I will also like to use the opportunity to bid you all a very warm welcome to the workshop, especially those of you who have traveled from other countries to be here with us this morning.

Mr. Chairman, I have described this consultation forum as important and for very good reasons too. This forum, which we are privileged to be hosting as a country, is for the purpose of providing an African perspective on global initiatives for the improvement of human resources for health development the world over well into the future.
Everyone is entitled to good health and therefore, access to health services of good quality is a fundamental human right. While there have been great strides globally to improve upon the delivery of health services and to meet goals such as the MDGs, it is well known that in sub-Saharan Africa we face the greatest burden of disease whilst having the lowest density of skilled health workers to fight it.

Although a skilled workforce is critical for health systems to perform well and produce health, we do have limitations in other critical aspects of healthcare delivery such as well distributed health infrastructure, requisite technology, medicines, financing, good policies and regulation which greatly affect health outcomes. However, without a well-motivated and qualified workforce, even well-resourced health systems cannot deliver the needed services.

To emphasize this point, there is now a painful realization globally, following the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak, that it is crucial to invest in resilient health systems in order to avoid such shocks; shocks that have severely affected not only the health sector, but social and economic growth of the whole sub-region.

Globally, the world rallied to provide urgently, all the health system elements (hundreds of staff, medicines, laboratory and diagnostics, hospital facilities, communications to name a few) to tackle the EBOLA epidemic. This required a huge investment of money well beyond what would have been needed for functional health systems. And so there are negative consequences, and sometimes catastrophic ones, if we do not invest in health systems and have a workforce that meets the needs of communities and populations wherever they may be.

That is why I am happy to note that the overall goal of the draft global strategy of human resources: *Workforce 2030* is to ensure availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of the health workforce through adequate investments and
the implementation of effective policies at country, regional, national, and global levels, for our people.

This proposed strategy is expected to represent a critical component of the WHO strategic vision towards universal health coverage (UHC) and its monitoring framework. The Global Strategy on Human Resource for Health (GSHRH) should fit within the frameworks of the sustainable development goals and the on-going WHO strategy on people-centred and integrated health services.

As you all know, Ministers of Health in the Africa Region have adopted two resolutions to call for a holistic approach to the development of the health workforce. In 2012 we also endorsed the road map for scaling up the health workforce to improve health service delivery. This road map proposed six key strategic areas: (i) Strengthening leadership and governance capacity of the Human Resource for Health (HRH); (ii) Strengthening HRH regulatory capacity in the Region; (iii) Scaling up education and training of health workers; (iv) Optimizing the utilization, retention and performance of the available HRH; (v) Improving HW information and evidence; (vi) and Strengthening partnership and dialogue for the HRH.

I also note that the four objectives of the draft global strategy on HRH cover similar themes of evidence-based HRH policies, investing in HRH in broader context of health systems and economic growth, building capacities for institutional HRH leadership and governance and basing these actions on reliable evidence to implement and monitor progress.

I am hopeful that the global strategy will take Africa’s peculiar human resources needs and challenges into consideration because unless there is a global undertaking that ensures equity of access to skilled health workers, our efforts at country and regional level on their own, will not accomplish much.
The Government of Ghana is investing a significant amount of money in training healthcare providers. Before 2008, Ghana had two medical schools with the capacity to produce close to two hundred Medical Officers. Currently, the country has five medical schools with the capacity to produce close to five hundred medical officers. There has been expansion in infrastructure and the number of trainees for nursing, midwifery and allied health programmes. The Government has developed strategies to retain health workers leading to a reduction in International Migration of Health workers from Ghana.

I am really happy to note that this consultation involves high level expertise from within our region as well as international experts to ensure that the global implications of this strategy on Africans are taken into account.

Our hope as a region is that we should be better prepared to work to attain the upcoming Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with its universal health coverage targets and do this better than we have fared with the MDGs which end in 2015. Having adequate numbers and a good and innovative mix of health workers, will be critical to our results in 2030.

I am informed that at the upcoming regional Committee meeting of WHO in August this year, Ministers of Health will be discussing the African Region’s perspective on the global strategy and that the output of this technical consultation will be used to inform our discussions. I therefore look forward to seeing your recommendations and hope that my colleague Ministers in the other African countries will also have the opportunity to study them before the Regional Committee meeting takes place.

On this note, Mr. Chairman, it is with the greatest pleasure that I declare this technical consultation officially opened. I wish you very fruitful deliberations and may God bless us all.
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