



## **KEYNOTE REMARKS**

**WORKNEH GEBEYEHU, IGAD EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

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**HANDOVER OF COVID-19 EQUIPMENT**

**MoU ON VACCINATION OF TRUCK DRIVERS**

**EFDA CONTRACT & CHEQUE**

**Ministry of Health, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia**

**Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2022**

- Your Excellency and my dear sister, **Dr. Lia Tadesse**, Minister of Health Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia;
- Your Excellency **Roland Kobia**, Head of the European Union Delegation to Ethiopia;
- Your Excellency **Sami Jamil Abdullah**, Ambassador of the Royal Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Ethiopia;
- **Dr. John Nkengasong**, Director of Africa CDC;
- Ms. **Heran Gerba**, Director General, Ethiopia Food and Drug Authority;
- Madam **Worknesh Mekonnen**, former Director of UNOPS, Multi-country Mission & Representative to African Union
- Representatives of our bilateral and multilateral development partners;
- **IGAD Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Good morning and a Happy Labour Day** to us all; for those who have travelled to be here with us today, **Welcome to Addis Ababa.**

Today is a historic day as we will be **making 3 giant strides towards Regional Integration through Health Cooperation,** as we take new measures in **safeguarding the Health & Safety of vulnerable populations** here in Ethiopia and the wider IGAD region;

1. IGAD will be **handing over vital life-saving Medical Vehicles** to the Ministry of Health;
2. Signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on the **Vaccination of Truck Drivers;**
3. We will be **entering into a medicines-testing & quality assurance agreement** with the Food and Drug Authority.

**607 days ago** (Exactly 20 Months) in August of 2020, **together we launched our opening salvo against the coronavirus pandemic in our region,** when we received and launched the first consignment of Covid-prevention equipment here in Addis Ababa's Bole Airport.

Then as now, **I shall open my remarks by sincerely thanking our most dependable partners the European Union, whose generosity has continued to keep our fight against the coronavirus alive and active.**

I also **earnestly thank our other funding partners in the covid-19 response namely;** the Africa Development Bank, GIZ and the German Cooperation, as well as the UN agencies and Trademark East Africa who are helping us implement our interventions.

**Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen;**

For over 2 years we have **continued to battle the virus and grapple with the social and economic impact that it has had on lives and livelihoods in our region.**

Although **we have been more fortunate than most other parts of the world,** the pandemic has nevertheless **claimed the lives of 23,450 of our brothers and sisters,** all whom are dearly missed by their friends and families.

It is truly alarming that the **Coronavirus has had the most detrimental effect of any natural or human-made disaster that the world has ever seen.**

**And yet, even now as we have become distracted by other challenges** such as the ongoing conflict in Eastern Europe as well as political instability, drought and flooding in our own region, **the coronavirus never went away and is in fact plotting a comeback as evidenced by the worrying situation in China with the new Omicron variant.**

I am **encouraged that we are better prepared to respond to a fresh outbreak than we were 2 years ago.** And the equipment that we are handing over here today **is expected to put us in an even better position to prevent the spread of infection amongst our most vulnerable sections of our population.**

I am therefore delighted in conjunction with our partners to hand-over 4 vehicles we to the Ministry of Health consisting of;

- **1 ambulance with advanced life support equipment** destined for Gelafi-Hawli border with the Republic of Djibouti;
- **2 basic ambulances** dispatched to the Metema and Moyale localities;

And;

- **1 mobile laboratory truck** that will serve all sites

These vehicles will **make a contribution to safeguarding the lives of refugees, migrants and host communities in the selected cross-border areas** as part of our wider and complementary interventions for regional health cooperation and integration.

**Excellencies,**

**IGAD remains committed to systematically addressing the challenges affecting our regional health systems including;** logistical limitations, shortages of laboratory test kits, lack of Infection Prevention and Control Materials and Critical Care Equipment

**Guided by the philosophy that no country shall be safe, until every country is safe,** our strategy emphasizes that “No-one Shall Be Left Behind”, especially **our brothers and sisters living in vulnerable communities** in 7 high-risk cross-border areas, 14 Refugee camps & IDP settlements and 11 migrant reception centers across all our Member States.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:**

IGAD is also focusing on longer term interventions that will significantly **contribute to strengthening national health systems.**

In this regard, as part of a wider effort to expand the virus testing capacity across the region, **we are working to procure 2 PCR Mass-Testing Machines for the Federal Republic of Ethiopia.**

**Excellencies, dear Colleagues;**

I now draw your attention once more to the elephant in the room; **the issue of vaccination.** Our distinguished medical experts here have always emphasized that **prevention is better than cure.**

Consequently, let us listen closely to their wise counsel and do everything we can **to scale up vaccination rates in our region which are some of the lowest in the world.**

I say this because, **we are still a long way from the globally recommended target of at least 70%.** This means we must source and distribute full vaccine doses for at least 165 million of our citizens as soon as possible.

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

Regarding the Memorandum of Understanding that we will sign today on the Vaccination of Truck Drivers, **it is another shining example of regional integration through health cooperation.**

It is also a critical step towards not only arresting the spread of the virus through our region, **but it also safeguards livelihoods and protects the regional economy by ensuring that essential supply chains are not disrupted once more.**

Furthermore, and in a complementary gesture on Regional Health Integration, IGAD with the generous support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), **has been working tirelessly for the last 4 years since 2018 to guarantee the safety of critical medicines administered to mothers, babies and adolescents** in selected cross-border areas.

With the technical support from our partner testing institute based in the United States, **IGAD carried out the first regional medicines quality survey in 2019.**

**The results were worrying;** we found that almost 21% the injection samples we tested did not meet quality specifications. In addition, **there are many unregistered and unregulated medicines in our region.**

This exercise **demonstrated the pressing need for multilateral cooperation through a regional framework of quality assurance of medicines.**

This is why since last year, **IGAD starting planning for the second regional medicine quality survey** as a follow-up of the first survey we did in 2019.

**This second quality survey is targeting Hand-sanitizers for the prevention of COVID-19,** as well as a range of other critical medicines in use for pre-natal and post-natal mothers and babies especially in refugee populations.

On behalf of the region and as a concrete step towards regional integration through healthcare, Ethiopia will be **testing samples collected from Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan.**

IGAD is going to facilitate payment of services offered by the Ethiopian Food and Drug Authority to recover the cost of conducting the tests and allocating specialist staff to this important exercise.

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

As I come to the conclusion of my remarks today, I therefore call upon all our friends and partners to **continue supporting us to strengthen regional health systems** by working together with us in partnership for a stronger and more resilient IGAD region.

And now; **I have the distinct privilege of officially handing over this life-saving consignment of medical vehicles to** the Ministry of Health of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

**It is also my pleasure to officially sign the Memorandum of Understanding on the Vaccination of Truck Drivers and release a lump-sum payment of 1.7 Million Ethiopian Birr to the Ethiopian Food & Drug Authority, all of which contribute to uniting our Region through Health Cooperation.**

**Thank You Very Much.**