ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT ELECT OF
THE AFRICAN FEDERATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATIONS
TO THE MINISTER OF HEALTH DURING THE
61ST WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD IN YAMOUSSOUKRO
29 AUGUST – 2 SEPTEMBER 2011

Honourable President of the 61st WHO Regional Committee for Africa
Honourable Director General of the WHO
Honourable Ministers
Director General of the WHO Africa Region
President of the World Federation of Public Health Associations
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great joy mixed with emotion that I stand before you, Honourable Ministers, on the occasion of the launching of the African Federation of Public Health Associations, which was created yesterday, Tuesday, August 30, 2011, in this city of Yamoussoukro, full of symbols.

The African Federation of Public Health Associations has finally been born after years of gestation, followed by a delivery that would not be possible without the active involvement of WHO AFRO Region Director, Dr Luis Gomes Sambo. The thirty national associations that participated in the Federation’s inaugural General Assembly also expressed its profound gratitude to him. Since 2005, when he first learned about our common project, Dr Luis Gomes Sambo
has not missed an opportunity to invite the stakeholders to reflect and talk among themselves about the legitimacy of our common ambition and to determine a mutually agreed upon pathway forward. It is his strong belief in public health as an approach which resulted in the development and implementation of health policies and programs that has motivated his continued support to us. We are thankful to him.

How can we consider this outcome without seeing also the conditions that each country has created to support and facilitate the creation and existence of the national public health associations, on whose behalf many efforts have been made to establish the Federation? We wish to express our appreciation to all States that permitted the creation of such associations. But beyond this step, some associations have entered into partnership agreements with Ministries of Health, while others have benefited from funding which allowed them to contribute to health development in their own countries. On behalf of all these associations, we express our deep appreciation to the Governments of these countries.

The Executive Committee of the new Federation would also like to pay a great tribute to the Canadian Public Health Association that has remarkably supported at some time over the past 25 years most of the public health associations in Africa, both financially and technically. We also wish to thank the American Public Health Association for the funding provided to support the first forum of African Associations of Public Health, held in Durban in November 2009.
The birth of the Federation is not an end in itself; quite the contrary. It marks the start of actions that will confirm the validity of its existence. Indeed, the overview presented by the WHO AFRO Regional Director about the health situation in Africa at the opening of this Regional Committee challenges all of us. The public health associations have no choice but to become engaged in the five priority areas identified by the WHO. In the name of the Executive Committee of the Federation, I declare our commitment to work actively to strengthen national health systems, to formulate healthy public policies and programs based on the principles of public health, to understand how to meet the needs of the greatest number of people in terms of the maintenance and protection of health, reducing the risk of disease and infirmity, and especially health promotion.

**Honourable Ministers,**

In addition to our involvement in policy making and in health programs, we will demonstrate our credibility and visibility through their implementation, including facilitating the participation of civil society and different target communities. Our belief that health policies and programs must be based on evidence compels us to work with you so that the data and results generated through different health research initiatives are not lost by being shut away in drawers or serve only the researchers’ careers. They must nourish the reflections of health planners and health program administrators and managers. To this end, you can be assured of our readiness to participate actively in the development and facilitation of consultation frameworks and exchanges between researchers on the one hand, and policy makers and administrators on the other. National health observatories are an essential means not only to identify and assess health risk factors, but as well the
problems facing the functioning of national health care systems. We appreciate the difficulties that many of our countries are facing in terms of putting into place and operation of national health observatories. Therefore, a special emphasis will be placed on this issue by the Executive Committee in the coming months, so that each African country can establish its own national health observatory.

I guess some people in this room ask "with what resources are they going to accomplish all of this? ". Well, the particularity of public health associations is their capacity to mobilize and orient all human skills in a country in the direction of public health priorities. The Executive Committee of this young Federation is considering substantive actions that will enable national associations to play a full and effective role to which they are committed.

**Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The team that dares to make such commitments is made up of highly motivated experts with extensive experience in the field of public health. They come from every corner of our vast continent and represent various professional fields. Besides the Presidency provided by **Burkina Faso**, the Executive Committee includes:

- the Vice President assured by **South Africa**,  
- the Secretariat entrusted to **Ethiopia**  
- capacity building of associations provided by **Uganda**  
- the domain of policies and programs given to **Cameroon**  
- scientific research and publications carried out by an academic from **Algeria**,
- the load complex advocacy, communication and public relations portfolio assumed by Côte d’Ivoire, and
- the administrative and financial affairs assigned to Mozambique.

**Honorable Ministers, ladies and gentlemen** who are our partners, without your trust and support it will be difficult for our young Federation to meet these commitments. At the same time, we recognize that your trust will be dependent upon us putting into place visible and credible actions. Therefore we commit ourselves to work in this direction because we believe that our continent can present socio-economic indicators of which we can be proud through the progress that will be achieved in each of our countries.

Thank you.