



**Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the
Establishment of the West African Health
Organisation (WAHO)**

Message from the Director General

July 9, 1987 – July 9, 2017, 30 years ago, the Heads of State and Government of the West African region, convinced that health is key to integration and socio-economic development of the region, adopted Protocol A/P2/7/87 establishing the West African Health Organisation (WAHO), as the sole specialised health institution for the region.

Likewise the previous years, it is fitting that today I pay a well-deserved tribute to the founding fathers of WAHO, who swiftly perceived the relevance of setting up this instrument of regional integration in health matters and whose main mission is to provide the highest level of health care benefits to the ECOWAS Population.

Achieving the objectives of this mission, which is both challenging and exciting is a long-term endeavor that WAHO is striving on a daily basis, to accomplish, with conviction and determination in collaboration with all ECOWAS Member States and the support of partners.

In thirty years of existence, considerable efforts have been made in the field of Health Governance, Strategic Partnership and Policy Harmonization, Control of Epidemics and other Diseases, Maternal and Newborn Health, Child, Adolescents, Youth and elderly peoples' Health, Health Systems Strengthening Research Development, Traditional Medicine, Human Resources for Health, Promotion of Good Practices, Essential Medicines and Vaccines, Health information etc. However, there remains a great deal to be done.

As a matter of fact, the West African region is still plagued by recurrent outbreaks of meningitis, cholera, measles, dengue, resurgence of highly pathogenic outbreaks of bird flu and most recently the outbreak of Rift Valley fever, and that of the Zika virus disease. The ECOWAS region still has memories of the deadly Ebola virus disease epidemic that came to remind us of the human-animal-ecosystem interface in the evolution and emergence of pathogens and,

especially the need to pool our efforts together, through the implementation of multiple-sector actions for stronger and more resilient health systems, in order to effectively address the increasing threat of epidemics.

Consequently, WAHO has decided to commemorate this 30th Anniversary under *the theme: “The “One Health” Approach: Synergy of Actions Required in Disease Control in West Africa”*.

This integrated approach to health focuses on the interactions between Human and Animal Health sectors and their various environments. It encourages collaboration, synergy and cross-fertilization of all sectors and stakeholders whose activities may have an impact on health.

Indeed, 75% of the new infectious diseases that have affected humans over the last decade are of animal origin. The purpose of the “One Health” approach is to improve the health and well-being of people through risk prevention and mitigation of crises arising from the interface between humans, animals and their ecosystems. It requires grasping health security in a comprehensive and cross-cutting perspective, calling for close cooperation among actors involved in human health, animal health, plant health, ecosystems and biodiversity, with a view to developing at both national and regional levels, mechanisms to efficiently and effectively implement surveillance, detect, prevent and control diseases.

In this perspective, several decisions were taken recently by the highest Authorities in our region, supporting the commencement of a paradigm shift in disease and epidemics control in our region. They are inter alia:

- Decision taken by the 47th Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS held in Accra, May 19, 2015, to establish the ECOWAS Regional Centre for Disease Surveillance and Control (ECOWAS – RCDSC) with headquarters in Abuja, Federal Republic of Nigeria;
- Induction of the ECOWAS Regional Rapid Response Team (ERRRT) referred to as “ECOWAS WHITE HELMETS”;
- Adoption of the Dakar Resolution, establishing a Regional Coordination Framework for the “One Health” approach, at the 50th session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS held in December 2016 ;
- Adoption of the Monrovia Declaration on Post Ebola recovery by the 51st Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS in

June 2017, in continuation of the Post-Ebola High Level meeting held in Monrovia in April 2017.

In keeping with this momentum, the just concluded Assembly of Health Ministers of ECOWAS held in Abuja, Nigeria June 16, 2017 adopted the terms of reference of the policy coordination platform of the ECOWAS “One Health” Regional Framework, as well as the road map for the main interventions to be carried out during the 2017-2018 period for its operationalization.

I should like here to express again my gratitude to all the Heads of State and Government of the region for their strong commitment, constant and unrelenting support to WAHO, in its quest for collective and strategic solutions to the health problems of our populations.

I would also like to place on record our appreciation and gratitude to Member States and call for strengthening of the already established link among actors of human health, animal health and those in charge of agriculture and environmental issues of our region for collective actions to tackle together the challenge of concerted and collective prevention and control of epidemics and thereby fast-tracking the socio-economic development of our region.

Furthermore, I would like to express once again, our deep gratitude to all Technical and Financial Partners for always being available to provide sustained support to our efforts towards ensuring a better health status to populations in our region.

I cannot conclude my remarks without stating our commitment to the ideals of integration championed by ECOWAS.

Long Live African Integration, Long Live ECOWAS, Long Live WAHO

Thank You

Dr. Xavier CRESPIAN, Director General of WAHO