

Statement by the World Council of Churches, in conjunction with All Africa Conference of Churches, Africa Christian Health Associations Platform and Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network to the 1st WHO Africa Health Forum. Kigali, Rwanda, 27 – 28 June 2017

Geneva. 21 June 2017. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in conjunction with All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), Africa Christian Health Associations Platform (ACHAP), and Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network (EPN).

We learn about the first ever WHO African Health Forum with joy as it brings together all stakeholders to deliberate on the health of Africans and strategise on how to make good the Agenda 2030 on the continent. Africans have suffered and suffered long. Therefore, any intervention to promote the health and well-being of Africans is timely and welcome. We, therefore, welcome the forum and salute WHO, the Republic of Rwanda and others that have been in the forefront of this initiative.

The World Council of Churches, a fellowship of 348 churches in 110 countries with over half a billion Christians, seeks the unity of all Christians in word and action, and in the pursuit of human dignity, justice and peace. Established in 1948, WCC has been active in health on the continent. At the dawn of the independence movement in Africa, WCC supported churches to organize their health missions so that they could easily collaborate with the ministries of health in the new post-colonial governments. Currently there are Christian health associations or some organized Christian health network in 26 African countries, providing from 30% to over 50% of healthcare and training up to 70% of health workers. The Africa Christian Health Associations Platform (ACHAP) was established in 2007 as an advocacy and networking platform for the Christian health associations in Africa.

World Council of Churches also established the Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network to support churches and church health systems to provide and promote just and compassionate quality pharmaceutical services – which is pivotal in delivering quality healthcare.

The All Africa Conference of Churches was established in 1963 and has accompanied the churches in their engagement in decolonisation and nation building processes, including running schools and hospitals. With 194 member Churches in 45 countries, AACC is the largest association of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox and Indigenous churches in Africa and is a member of the worldwide ecumenical network.

WCC, AACC, ACHAP and EPN represent the most extensive healthcare network in Africa, reaching especially hard-to-reach, underprivileged people with programmes and facilities for preventive and health promotion services, primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare, health worker training, and integrated health and community development. These structures provide an indispensable permanent, indigenous, community base for improving public health, and their ethical formation and teaching is one of the key social determinants for health.

In the quest for realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially Universal Health Coverage in Africa, the role of the church cannot be overlooked. We thus regret to note the absence of our constituency in this forum and hope that next time we will be meaningfully engaged so that this forum is indeed all-inclusive.

WCC, AACC, ACHAP and EPN believe that in addressing the health challenges of Africa we should adopt a holistic approach. Whilst we strengthen the health sector, we collaborate with all sectors that impact on health. We advocate and support efforts to replace exploitative and extractive trade with Africa with a just and sustainable trading system. We pray and fight against structures that perpetuate injustice and inequality. We pray and teach against harmful religious and cultural practices. We pray for and support efforts to silence the guns in Africa.

Health is more than medicine. It is to do with the way people live and the way they die, the quality of life and the quality of death. We, the WCC, AACC, ACHAP and EPN, are committed to supporting the African health agenda by mobilising and equipping our members for renewed, holistic and coordinated actions on health, leveraging our resources while strengthening mutual partnerships with others of good will.

Thank you.