

OPENING ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THE FEDERATION AND CHAIRMAN PRESIDENTIAL STEERING COMMITTEE (PSC) ON COVID-19, BOSS MUSTAPHA AT THE MEETING FEDERAL MINISTRY OF HEALTH, FEDERAL MDAs, AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS WITH COMMISSIONERS OF HEALTH FROM ALL STATES OF THE FEDERATION, HELD ON THURSDAY, 2ND SEPTEMBER 2021 AT THE CONGRESS HALL, TRANSCORP HILTON HOTEL, ABUJA

Protocols

It gives me great pleasure to be part of the opening session of this historic meeting involving the Federal Ministry of Health, Federal MDAs, Development Partners and Health Commissioners from all the States of the Federation.

2. Before I go further, let me deliver the warm felicitation of His Excellency, Muhammadu Buhari, President, Federal Republic of Nigeria who continues to champion the prioritisation of health issues on the national agenda and eagerly awaits the outcome of this meeting.

3. I would similarly like to acknowledge the Nigeria Governors' Forum for supporting this important meeting that has brought together key actors in the health sector at the national and sub-national levels, to discuss contemporary issues impacting the health sector in our country. This meeting could not have come at a better time than now because, Nigeria and the global community remain locked in battle with the COVID19 pandemic and other emerging issues in the health sector.

4. The health of the citizens, as you know, is the health of the nation. This statement underscores the important

relationship between health & other sectors including socio-economic development and security.

5. There is no doubt that COVID-19 pandemic remains the most defining global health crisis of our time. The pandemic has not only stretched countries' health resources globally, but has also caused unimaginable havoc to the social, political, and economic development of all countries. Nigeria has till date recorded 192,430 infections, 178,759 discharged and 2,469 fatalities. All these would not have been possible without your involvement.

6. Although the number of cases came down a few months back, the number has once again begun to rise and we are currently witnessing a third wave of the pandemic, which is largely driven by the Delta variant of the virus and fuelled by the non-adherence to public health measures by the general public.

7. The Presidential Steering Committee (PSC) on COVID-19, the multi-sectoral body driving the national response has clearly underpinned the importance of collaboration, at all levels to the success of our national response. This is sign posted by dialogue, enforcement, investment, risk communication and effective surveillance by all stake holders. It is in this regard that I urge you as Commissioners to provide effective leadership at State level.

8. The Federal Government, in its determination to ensure that the health sector is strengthened, has continued to provide financial, technical and infrastructure support to sub-national entities. At the peak of the pandemic, with the exception of Lagos and Kano States, other States and the FCT received One billion Naira each.

9. In the area of infrastructure, PCR laboratories were delivered in each State of the federation. Through the

CACOVID, each state was to receive a thirty-bed ICU for critical care. Recently, the President approved the construction of one oxygen plant in each state of the federation.

10. For the national response to be effective, therefore, all stakeholders including the national and sub-national entities must play their roles in a complementary manner because the lives of our citizens remain very precious and their safety is our responsibility. The race against COVID-19 is a marathon and we should never become weary.

11. Research and science have played their parts in taking the battle against the virus to the vaccines stage. Global vaccine nationalism is still raging but we have succeeded in accessing millions of doses of vaccines through partnership and diplomatic efforts. The acquisition of sufficient doses that will enable us vaccinate 70% of our population is in progress. ~~As at date over 4.5 million Nigerians have been vaccinated fully or have received the first dose.~~ Only recently the second round of vaccination was launched.

12. You should in the course of this meeting, deliberate on the challenges caused by vaccine hesitancy all over the country. It is expected that you will come with policy alternatives as solutions. Let me state however, that Federal Government shall, very shortly unveil its decision on mandatory vaccination for every employee in its service.

13. I am happy to note that this meeting will be discussing broader health issues such as (i) the Basic Health Care Provision Fund; (ii) strengthening Primary Health Care; (iii) HIV/AIDS control with its multisectoral consequence; (iv) Universal Health Coverage; (v) Health Insurance, as well as various high impact interventions being implemented either directly or with our development partners.

14. It is my expectation that all those identified challenges hindering smooth implementation of partnership support at the

subnational level would be outlined and measures to address them articulated and agreed upon by the end of this meeting.

15. The Federal Government also expects that you will find time as policy and decision makers, to also address the root causes of incessant labour crisis in the health sector.

16. I would like to use this opportunity to appreciate the numerous supports received through our development partners and organizations such as ^{CA-LAVI} Aliko Dangote Foundation, BMGF, GAVI, USAID, FCDO, EU, GAC, JICA, UNICEF, and other United Nation Agencies. We do not take our relationship for granted.

17. I would also like to acknowledge the Federal Ministries of Health and that of Finance, Budget and National Planning for effectively coordinating partner activities across the country.

18. In the same spirit, I would like to thank the Nigerian Governors' Forum for the collaboration with the Federal Government and for supporting this meeting.

19. Ladies and gentlemen, it is now my singular honour and privilege to declare this meeting of critical stakeholders in the health sector open.

20. Wish you all a fruitful deliberation.