Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General

Your Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairman of the African Union Commission,
Honourable Ambassadors, distinguished guests, dear colleagues and friends,

I would like to begin by welcoming Your Excellency the Chairman to Geneva, and to thank you for your leadership in keeping health high on the African Union agenda.

I was delighted to be at the AU Summit in Addis earlier this year when the *Addis Ababa Call to Action* on universal health coverage was endorsed by our Leaders.

African Union members have committed to increasing domestic investment in health, and to being accountable for that commitment.

This is very significant, and is more evidence of the fact that we are living at a time of unprecedented political commitment to global health.

At the United Nations General Assembly in September, all 193 UN Member States approved the political declaration on universal health coverage.
Three weeks later, at the Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly in Belgrade, legislators from 140 countries adopted a global resolution to translate that political commitment into reality.

WHO is proud to be working with African Union countries to help implement these historic commitments.
The signing of the new Memorandum of Understanding between our two organizations will help us to formalize our cooperation in three key areas.

First, we have committed to working together to support the African Medicines Agency. Investment is very important. As you know a few weeks ago the European Medicines Agency licensed the first Ebola vaccine and the idea is to build that type of capacity in our countries.

Access to medicines that are high-quality, safe and effective is a core pillar of universal health coverage.

Too many of our brothers and sisters either don’t have access to the medicines they need, or use medicines that are substandard or falsified.

Over the last 4 years, WHO, the African Union and NEPAD have worked together to support the establishment of the African Medicines Agency.

We welcome the African Union's decision to endorse the treaty establishing the AMA.

WHO stands ready to provide further support to define the scope of activities, and to provide high-quality technical expertise.
In particular, we are devoted to creating an enabling environment to foster local production, which is central to the African Medicines Agency's work.

A WHO mission has just come back from Addis Ababa to discuss the details related to our support. The MOU is being implemented before the signing and what will be agreed tomorrow are all concrete steps.

The second key element of the MoU is strengthened collaboration between the African Center for Disease Control and Prevention and WHO.

The current Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a stark reminder that many AU countries are vulnerable to the impact of epidemics.

By the way for your information, the Ambassador knows how many times I have been to DRC (11 times).

But it is our failure to invest in health systems leaving individuals, families and communities at risk, making all of us vulnerable.

As we have seen so many times, when a disease outbreak, natural disaster, or other health emergency hits a weak health system, it can do lasting damage to an entire country, an entire region.

For too long, the world has invested in panic, rather than in epidemic preparedness. We throw money at an outbreak, and when it's finished, we do nothing to prevent the next one.

We simply cannot afford to operate on this short-sighted cycle.

WHO is committed to working with all AU Member States to build your core capacities for health security.ÂÂ And it is better to do it with the Africa CDC.

We will also support efforts to strengthen the health workforce in AU countries, and to establish the African Volunteer Health Corps.

We will support the development and implementation of national action plans for health security, including advocacy for better preparedness and multisectoral engagement.

The recent health ministers meeting jointly organized by the African Union, Africa CDC and WHO in Goma on cross-border coordination for Ebola and other health emergencies is testimony of our growing partnership.

And third, we have agreed to work together to implement the Addis Ababa Call to Action on universal health coverage.

The Call to Action represents a very strong commitment to increasing domestic funding, which is essential for achieving UHC.

And the best investment in UHC is in primary health care, with a focus on promoting health and preventing disease, rather than simply managing diseases in hospitals.

That's why WHO is calling on all countries to increase their investment in primary health care by 1% of GDP, either through new investments, reallocation or both.

To make that happen, WHO will facilitate dialogue between Finance and Health Ministers to help countries develop strong and sustainable health financing models.

But we must also foster dialogue with all sectors of government to address the reasons people get sick and die, in the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, and the conditions in which we live, work and play.

New challenges, such as antimicrobial resistance and the damaging effects of air pollution and climate change, are not a matter for the health sector alone.

WHO stands ready to work with all countries to provide our technical expertise on how to make the investments that deliver the greatest impact.

Universal health coverage is not a choice a country makes once. It's a choice that must be made every day, in every policy decision.

We are counting on strong leadership from each of your governments to deliver on the promise of UHC. And I would like to take this opportunity to appreciate your Leadership, your excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat and President Kagamé.

Excellencies, dear colleagues and friends,

The three pillars of our new MoU pose three challenges that we must address together if we are to realize our shared vision for a healthier, safer, fairer Africa.

First, we must invest in access to medical products that are high-quality, safe and effective.
Second, we must invest in preparedness, not panic.
And third, we must invest in primary health care.

Thank you once again, Your Excellency, for your support, your leadership and partnership.

WHO looks forward to working with you, and with all African Union Member States.
For now, the MoU we are signing is just a piece of a paper.
I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Commissioners Amina and John.

Together, we will make it a reality in the lives of the people we serve.

I thank you. Merci beaucoup.