

**Annual Ministerial Review of ECOSOC
Regional Ministerial Meeting for Africa on
“eHealth – use of information and communication technology for health”
Accra, Ghana
10-11 June, 2009**

**Statement by the President of the Economic and Social Council
H.E. Ambassador Sylvie Lucas
Permanent Representative of Luxembourg to the United Nations**

Honourable Vice-President
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank wholeheartedly the Government of Ghana for organizing this important Regional Ministerial Meeting for the Annual Ministerial Review of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The theme of “eHealth – use of information and communication technology for health” is of particular relevance and timeliness.

Our sincere gratitude goes especially to the Vice-President of Ghana, H.E. John Mahama. The Vice-President’s thought-provoking statement will help guide our discussions over the next two days. I would also like to salute the presence of the Minister of Health of Ghana, H.E. George Sipa-Adjah Yankey.

This year’s Annual Ministerial Review of the Council will focus on the theme of global public health, with the aim to advance progress on global health and to spur international actions towards reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and curtailing HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. This Africa

Regional Ministerial meeting marks a significant preparatory event for the July session of the Council.

I would like to begin with a few words about eHealth in the broader context of the global development agenda and the work of ECOSOC.

eHealth is one of the most rapidly growing areas to advance agreed development goals, in particular goals related to health. The coming together of new technologies with the health sectors at the nexus of digital health has far reaching implications for development policy and resource mobilization. In the last few years, the adoption of these technologies has grown rapidly and the current infrastructure presents enormous opportunities for eHealth in Africa and other regions.

We see that the proper use of ICT's in health can help to reach not only health-related Millennium Development Goals, but all the MDGs by improving quality and efficiency in primary care and by enabling people in remote areas to access services and expertise. In order to make it happen, we need a coordinated and concentrated effort. Stakeholders in strategy development and implementation are wide ranging. They include governments, public and non-governmental organizations, the medical community, the private sector, academia, the donor community and civil society

We therefore need also to strengthen the evaluation mechanisms to give policy- and decision makers the tools to promote a coherent and coordinated approach. While these evaluations need of course to look at cost-benefit analysis, they should also look at the impact and the performance of ICT on the health of

the concerned populations. In order to safeguard sustainability, projects need to be demand-driven, so as not to increase already fragmented health systems.

International and national standardization and interoperability are equally important to safeguard investments in eHealth.

Your regional meeting provides an occasion to promote eHealth approaches tailored to the needs and circumstance of countries, communities and the region. Countries can learn from the variety of experiences in the region and elsewhere and address the need for external support. This meeting can help in knowing where we stand in terms of eHealth in Africa, where the challenges lie - some of which I tried to point out-, and what could be done to increase the use of ICTs at the local, national, and regional levels.

This Africa regional meeting constitutes a key regional input for the 2009 AMR of ECOSOC to be held at the UN headquarters in Geneva. It is an important opportunity for the African region to advance the health outcomes and the development needs of Africa through the Economic and Social Council, which promotes multi-sectoral action through the engagement of all relevant stakeholders. Such broad-based engagement is crucial for advancing the health agenda.

Furthermore, this meeting completes a series of consultations that we have held for the preparation of our July session. The first regional ministerial meeting was for South Asian countries and it took place in Sri Lanka on the theme “Financing strategies for health care”. In the wake of the global financial and economic crisis, this theme could not have been more relevant. In April, the

regional meeting for the Asia and Pacific Region was organized around the topic of “Promoting Health Literacy”. One of the key messages of the meeting was to develop a regional action plan to increase the levels of Health Literacy in the Asia-Pacific region. Cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases, as well as injuries, represent a rapidly growing epidemic. In May, the Western Asia Regional Ministerial Meeting focused thus on “Preventing and Controlling Non-Communicable Diseases and Injuries” in Doha, Qatar. And just last weekend, a fourth meeting was organized on the theme of “HIV and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean” in Montego Bay, Jamaica.

The issue of eHealth is relevant to all the themes of the regional meetings. Your deliberations here will help in mainstreaming this approach.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I look forward to hearing your ideas on these issues and to stimulating discussions over these coming two days. I hope that, by the end of the day tomorrow, you will have strong policy messages on how to seize the opportunities offered by ICT to advance eHealth in Africa and all over the world in the 21st century. Your messages will be carried by the Minister of Health of Ghana, His Excellency George Sipa-Adjah Yankey to the Annual Ministerial Review, which will be held in Geneva early next month.

Thank you very much.