COVID-19 IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA: WE NEED A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED RESPONSE

While acknowledging the great efforts of our nations and states to mobilize resources to contain and halt the spread of the COVID-19, the PHM West and Central Africa calls for transparency in the management of the resources and award of contracts in responding to the pandemic.

We also invite our leaders to shed light on the collateral damages of COVID-19, such as the challenges raised by certain measures or by inaction which have led in some countries to unacceptable cases of police misconducts and loss of lives.

Without a doubt, the ravaging nature of the disease – the deaths and the wave of new infections remain a major threat to humanity and the world economy. In solidarity with our nations, there are donations and supports of all kind to help effectively respond to the spread. In the region, there are both cash and in-kind donations from organizations and individuals determined to support the fight against COVID-19. For example, the West African Development Bank has granted US $ 8 million to each of the eight Member States of the West African Economic and Monetary Union. The West African Health Organization has distributed diagnostic test kits to its Member States. In Central Africa, ministers of economy of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community are mobilizing funds for the response in Member States and called for African debt cancellation to address the crisis.

Also, the Global Fund for HIV / AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has authorized certain countries, notably those in the Abidjan-Lagos corridor, to use up to 5% of the amount allocated to them in order to protect professionals from health, communicate with affected populations and work "to maintain essential services, coordinate the supply chain, quickly replenish stocks, disinfect equipment and manage waste" as part of the responds to COVID-19.

While appreciating these inflows, the PHM is of firm belief that there should be greater transparency and accountability, and demand that the list of all donations and their management plans be published.

The PHM West and Central Africa welcomes the decision of some countries to ban the advertising of professionals and medical products in the wake of the pandemic. Some of these advertisings highlight fake medicines or vaccines of COVID-19 and bring confusion.
While acknowledging the Global Fund’s desire to help countries out of the pandemic, we are concerned about the effects of the reassignment of grants to cover COVID-19 response. HIV is still ravaging West and Central Africa - 5 million people infected, 280,000 new infections, 160,000 deaths in 2018 according to the UNAIDS. Barely 64% of those infected know their status and only 51% of them have access to treatment.

We are not trying to say that the panacea to HIV, tuberculosis and malaria is the Global Fund or other vertical programs. But in a context of countries’ poor capacity to mobilize internal resources, such assistance is really important for people leaving with HIV. We recognize the urgency given the sudden pandemic, but we don’t think that spending the money without replacing it would be good news for people living with HIV and TB.

We also take the opportunity of this World Health Day to call for a reduction in the cost of technological transfer by training and giving priority to local skilled workers. This is why, while thanking the Global Fund, we encourage it to work towards mobilizing resources for the response, like for example, the circle of economists and health experts who call on the G20 to finance the response and its effects to avoid disaster including in low and middle income countries.

We strongly support this call which is based on the request by the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board of “$ 8 billion in emergency funding, including $ 2 billion to strengthen emergency response and preparedness of the WHO, $ 0.75 billion for diagnosis, $ 3 billion for development and distribution of vaccines, and $ 2.25 billion for therapeutic drugs to prevent and treat COVID-19”.

Finally, we call on the populations, the media and civil society groups in the region to remain mobilized and to report any human rights abuse because it is together that we will defeat COVID-19!

PHM West and Central Africa - Health for All, Now!

For more see www.phmwcafrica.wordpress.com