

Keynote Address by H.E. Chief Lucky Igbinedion, Former Governor of Edo State and Deputy Chancellor, Igbinedion University, Okada

At the launch of the CoDA Independent Task Team on the Development of Vaccines, and Equitable, Universal Access to Essential Vaccines and Vaccinations in Africa

Monday, 21 June 2021 at Igbinedion University, Okada

H.E. Chief Gabriel Osawaru Igbinedion, Chancellor, Igbinedion University

H.E. Godwin Obaseki, Governor of Edo State

H.E. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Former President of Nigeria and Chair of the Board of CoDA, ably represented by H.E. Abdoulaye Bathily, Co-Founder and Board Member of CoDA

H.E. Dr Monique Nsanzabaganwa, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission

Prof. Benedict Oramah, President and Chairman, Board of Trustees, Afreximbank & Chairman, Board of Trustees for the African Union COVID-19 Response Fund

Honourable Dr Osagie Ehanire, Minister of Health, Federal Republic of Nigeria

Ms Souad Aden-Osman, Executive Director, Coalition for Dialogue on Africa (CoDA)

Other dignitaries present

Ladies and gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that I bring you these few words on the launch of the CoDA Independent Task Team on the Development of Vaccines, and Equitable, Universal Access to Essential Vaccines and Vaccinations in Africa.

Let me first thank all of you who have honoured the invitation to attend this launch. I am impressed by the attendance physically and online, and this gives me the assurance that Africans are very much eager to see some transformation and upward thrust in the public health space across the continent.

I congratulate the Coalition for Dialogue on Africa (CoDA), the African Union Commission, Afreximbank and other partners for organizing this programme in partnership with Igbinedion University Teaching Hospital, Okada, Nigeria.

Africa has experienced several disease outbreaks and epidemics in the past. We all remember the Ebola virus disease outbreak in parts of West Africa in 2014 and 2015, the repeat outbreaks in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the new outbreak that was reported this year in Guinea. Apart from these, we have seen several outbreaks of cholera, yellow fever, Lassa fever, rift valley fever, listeriosis and many more on the continent. And now the most severe of them, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected every country and has negatively affected every aspect of human life.

This long list of infectious diseases tells us that Africa will always experience one outbreak or the other that has the potential to disrupt human life and activities, as we have seen with the COVID-19 pandemic. It also tells us that Africa must take definite and urgent actions to enhance response to epidemics, pandemics, and disease outbreaks. It further tells us that Africa must own and control its public health response, to make it applicable to its populations.

Although Africa is least affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been the most disadvantaged in terms of response because of the scarcity of the simple tools needed for appropriate response such as intensive care units, medical oxygen, ventilators, personal protective equipment, test kits, medicines, other medical supplies, and most importantly at this time vaccines needed to vaccinate the populations. This scarcity has been because Africa manufactures only a little fraction of its medical equipment and health commodities supplies.

With only about **one percent** of its population fully vaccinated against COVID-19, Africa is far behind in vaccination. It is the continent with the lowest number of fully vaccinated persons. This is unacceptable in a continent of about 1.3 billion people who have very high intellectual capacity and vast resources.

I am however happy that all hope is not lost. We still have a great opportunity to salvage our health system and strengthen our public health emergency response.

With the support of African scientists, the world now has a vaccine against Ebola virus disease. Africa currently manufactures vaccines for yellow fever and some of the infectious animal diseases. The continent has some of the best scientists in the world, some of whom have been involved in developing the current COVID-19 vaccines.

It is my believe that Africa can build on the current progress in vaccine research, development and manufacturing to solve the problems of infectious diseases on the

continent, by scaling up research and building capacity towards production and manufacturing.

On this note, Igbinedion University Okada is delighted to champion this new initiative that will facilitate the development, manufacturing and distribution of vaccines in Africa. And we are fortunate to have found a suitable ally in CoDA, an institution with a similar vision and ready to work with us on this laudable initiative.

We recognize other actions currently being taken by the African Union, Africa CDC, the World Health Organization, and other partners across the continent, and I would like to emphasize that our initiative is not meant to duplicate what is already being done. The initiative will complement all other efforts to ensure that Africa becomes self-sufficient in vaccine development and production.

We also recognize the inability of the African Union Member States and intergovernmental institutions to provide all the solutions to Africa's vaccine problems, and that is why Igbinedion University and other private sector institutions are coming together to create a platform to engage on policy, research and manufacturing that will pave the way for the development and production of essential vaccines in Africa.

We will certainly require the support and partnership of other academic, research and philanthropic institutions, as well as the community and faith leaders, and the civil society. We will be reaching out to them with the support of CoDA to ensure that our solutions and initiatives are holistic and people focused. We will also be working with the Africa Business Council, the Pan-African Manufacturers Association and other private sector initiatives to ensure full actualization of the vision of this initiative.

As part of the initiative being launched today, Igbinedion University is setting up a centre of excellence that will foster partnerships and collaborations on equitable and universal access to essential vaccines and vaccinations in Africa. At Igbinedion University, we do not believe in too much of talking, we are more interested in the results from any initiative we are involved. Therefore, the university is committing enormous resources to ensure a successful take-off of the initiative and will continue to do everything within our means to nurture it to maturity.

This initiative is the result of a series of consultations between CoDA Board of Directors, led by H.E. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, and relevant institutions and individuals. I am delighted that what started as an over-the-coffee discussion is today transforming into an independent continental platform that will better prepare Africa to respond to public health emergencies in the future and help improve lives and

livelihoods across the continent. I am delighted that Igbinedion University could champion such very important life-saving programme for Africa.

Through the initiative, we hope to attract high calibre scientific and research expertise from the continent and around the world to advance vaccine research, development and manufacturing in Africa.

I would like to assure you that Igbinedion University is not taking this initiative lightly, it is for us one of those essential initiatives that Africa must undertake to further advance and strengthen its health systems. And we are fully prepared to nurture it to global success.

Every journey must start with a step, and Igbinedion University is happy to take this major step with CoDA towards transforming public health and ensuring continent-wide availability and access to essential vaccines and vaccinations in Africa. This is a huge undertaking that will require cooperation from everyone, particularly the private sector, and I am using this opportunity to appeal to private and public universities as well as research and other private sector institutions in Africa to join us in this journey of vaccine industrialization in Africa.

Remember, businesses can only thrive in a healthy environment and one way to ensure that we create that environment is to make essential vaccines available to the public in quantities that are adequate and available when and where they are needed.

Join us in this historic initiative to re-write the story of Africa from being totally dependent on foreign sources for its human vaccine needs to becoming self-sufficient in vaccine production.

Thank you all for listening.