

SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY, GOV. GODWIN OBASEKI for THE LAUNCH OF THE INDEPENDENT TASK TEAM OF THE COALITION FOR DIALOGUE ON AFRICA (CoDA) ON EQUITABLE & UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO VACCINES AND VACCINATION IN AFRICA*

(21 June, 2021 @ Okada Town, Edo State, Nigeria)

The recent outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) across the globe with its attendant threats to the social and economic survival of even the most stable economies, has caused nations and leaders the world over to rethink the importance of effective measures for the control of communicable diseases, of which vaccination still ranks as perhaps the most efficient and sustainable intervention.

Vaccines have helped the world to deal with various debilitating ailments and potentially devastating infections and diseases that could have spiralled into pandemics and spelled global doom, such as polio, smallpox, meningitis, pneumonia and diarrhea, among several others. Most of these ailments have either been totally eradicated or brought under firm control with the help of vaccines.

But unfortunately, for Africa, the full benefits of vaccines have not been brought to bear in the management of diseases and infections. This is even as the evidence of its efficacy in curtailing deadly infections in other parts of the world abound.

For example, malaria, a tropical disease that is prevalent only in Africa, still kills up to 1 million children every year. About 40 million people are living with HIV/AIDS globally, nearly 70 percent of them are in Africa. Despite the best efforts of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other development partners, we are yet to develop effective vaccines against these two deadly diseases (malaria and HIV/AIDS).

Also worthy of note is the fact that by March 2021, one year after the shutdown of the global economy with the outbreak of COVID-19, less than 2 percent of the about 1.4 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines given globally has reached Africa.

The launch of an Independent Task Team on Equitable and Universal Access to Vaccines and Vaccination in Africa – the initiative of The Coalition for Dialogue on Africa (CoDA) and partners is therefore occurring at a time in the global history of vaccines and vaccinations when there have been outcries about inequities in the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. These inequities have been variously described as “shameful”, “scandalous, and “a crisis within a crisis”.

Over 80% of COVID-19 vaccines that have been administered globally have been taken up by high- and upper-middle-income countries; only 0.2% have gone to low-income countries.

The scourge of COVID-19 on countries in Africa is far beyond the numbers that have been infected (about 1.6 million persons), and those who have succumbed (over 37,000 persons) to the disease. About 40 million Africans have slipped into extreme poverty, and six out of every 10 people around the globe who will become poor in the wake of this pandemic will be Africans.

It is heart-warming that CoDA and the African Union, the African Export Import Bank, with Igbinedion University are set to address health system challenges in Africa in a bid to achieve equitable access to vaccines and vaccination across the continent.

My government is currently implementing wide-ranging health sector reforms which are geared towards achieving quality healthcare and universal health coverage for our people. Considerations for equity in access to healthcare, healthcare commodities and technologies are at the heart of our reforms – especially for vulnerable and under-represented groups.

I have personally been on the frontlines of the State’s COVID-19 response since March 2020. We have 62 vaccination teams working in our 18 LGAs. We vaccinated over 38,000 of the targeted 47,944 persons in the first phase of COVID-19 vaccinations. Second-dose vaccinations began on June 1, 2021 and are ongoing.

I assure you that CoDA and her partners will find the Government of Edo State a veritable collaborator in the tasks ahead, particularly that of achieving equitable access to vaccines and vaccinations in all of Africa.

Concluding Remarks

I welcome you to Edo State. We have the institutions, human resources and the wherewithal to support your initiatives in health systems strengthening towards achieving equitable access to vaccines and vaccinations in Africa. You can be assured of my unalloyed support.

We look forward to fruitful partnerships with all stakeholders, and especially with the soon-to-be-launched Independent Task Team on Equitable and Universal Access to Vaccines and Vaccination in Africa.