

Opening Remarks by H.E. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Former President of Nigeria and Chair of the Board of Directors, Coalition for Dialogue on Africa

At the CoDA Dialogue on Africa's Response to COVID-19 and Equitable Access to Vaccines and Vaccination

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For more than one year, the world has been under the siege of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the pandemic has not shown any sign of abating despite efforts by healthcare workers and authorities. We see the number of cases increase every day. In Africa, as in other parts of the world, we have witnessed the first and second waves, and some countries are even witnessing a third wave already. Many lives have been lost and many families and businesses have been affected because of the associated lockdowns and restrictions. This is most unexpected.

But shall we continue to live with this pandemic? No! The current situation only tells us that we need to do more and that we need more involvement by the different sectors of the society to get the pandemic under control.

This is the reason governments, international organizations, the private sector and individuals are working hard to find lasting solutions to the pandemic and the problems it has brought on the world. In Africa, we are doing a lot to find an end to the pandemic, our governments have been overstretched and our healthcare facilities and communities are feeling the impact of this deadly pandemic.

The response of our healthcare workers, under the leadership of the global, continental and regional organizations, has been awesome and beyond expectation. I would like at this time to acknowledge their sacrificial service and efforts to keep our continent safe.

I commend the leadership role played by the African Union through several of its organs and particularly through the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC). These efforts have helped Africa to prevent a major catastrophe due to the pandemic. I also acknowledge our global coordinating mechanisms under the leadership of the World Health Organization. Their efforts have given us hope of seeing an end to the pandemic.

We are all aware of how much this pandemic has disrupted the lives of our populations socially, economically and politically. And this is the reason the Coalition for Dialogue on Africa (CoDA) is stepping in to support Africa CDC in making safe and efficacious vaccines available and accessible across Africa.

With this dialogue and other follow-up activities, CoDA is supporting implementation of some aspects of Africa's vaccines development and access strategy which was developed in June last year and other aspects of the response as necessary. Through its networks, CoDA is reaching out to a wider stream of stakeholders and partners to help increase commitments to make the vaccines available in cities, villages and communities across Africa.

Beyond COVID-19, Africa needs a forward-looking roadmap for addressing the shortcomings we have witnessed in Africa's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to make sure that future pandemics do not meet us unawares as did the current pandemic. Africa needs a more sustainable approach to addressing the challenges associated with accessing vaccines and other services for public health emergencies and this is an area that CoDA intends to provide some support.

In partnership with the College of Medical Sciences of the Igbinedion University, researchers, scientists, academia, international partners, and the private sector we are initiating a new programme that will support and strengthen our governments' efforts to make vaccines and vaccination accessible to everyone who needs it across the continent now and in the future.

I commend the efforts of those who have been involved in organizing this dialogue, the panellists as well as the participants. And I am personally delighted to be a part of these efforts to find solutions to Africa's most pertinent problem at this time.

I personally look forward to seeing the outcomes of this dialogue and the follow-up actions and will provide every support needed to ensure full implementation.

I thank you all for being part of this historic event.