

**Opening remarks
Member State briefing on COVID-19
WHO HQ, Geneva, Switzerland
15 October 2020**

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, esteemed colleagues,

Thank you for joining us for this week's Member State briefing.

Two weeks ago I informed you about allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse during the Ebola response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Today, I am announcing the establishment of an Independent Commission to investigate these allegations, identify systemic issues, and review existing prevention measures.

The commission will be co-chaired by Her Excellency Aichatou Mindadoudou, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Social development from Niger, who has led and held senior UN posts in Côte d'Ivoire and Darfur.

She will be joined by co-chair Julienne Lusenge of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an internationally recognized human rights activist and advocate for survivors of sexual violence in conflict.

The role of the Independent Commission will be to swiftly establish the facts, identify and support survivors, ensure that any ongoing abuse has stopped, and hold perpetrators to account.

We look forward to their recommendations.

The co-chairs will choose the other members of the panel, which will be supported by a Secretariat based at WHO comprised of staff of the organizations concerned.

To support the commission's work, I have decided to use an open process to hire an independent and external organization with experience in conducting similar inquiries.

Meanwhile, WHO is already taking steps to ensure our existing prevention and protection mechanisms are fit-for-purpose and fully implemented in all of our emergency operations.

I would like to reiterate: the betrayal of people in the communities we serve is reprehensible.

WHO has a very clear policy on sexual exploitation and abuse: zero tolerance.

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Now, to today's briefing.

We will start with presentations on lessons learned in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic from two countries in the Africa Region.

We will first hear from His Excellency Dr Ahmadou Lamin Samateh, Minister of Health of The Gambia.

We will then have a presentation from Dr Agnes Mahomva, the chief COVID-19 coordinator of the Office of the President and Cabinet from Zimbabwe.

Following the two country presentations we will receive an update from my colleague Brett Archer, who will discuss trends in cases and mortality rates, and identify areas of particular concern.

He will also be introducing some powerful information products, the WHO COVID-19 Dashboard and the new Explorer app.

These tools have been developed to share and visualize the data and information that you, the Member States, share with WHO on a daily basis.

The Dashboard has daily updates on cases, deaths, and transmission, with tools such as interactive maps, epidemic curves, and downloadable country-specific information.

The Explorer contains tools to monitor key indicators in areas such as testing and response.

Finally, we will be have an update on the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator.

We have some special guests today, the co-chairs of the ACT-Accelerator Facilitation Council.

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Mr John-Arne Røttingen, Chief Executive of the Research Council of Norway, and Dr Lindiwe Makubalo, the Health Attaché of the Permanent Mission of South Africa here in Geneva.

Thank you all once again for your continued support and commitment.

We look forward to your questions.

I thank you.