

30 July 2020 – Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to mark the grim milestone of our approach towards one million cases of COVID-19 in Africa.

As we approach the Eid Al Adha feast, there is increased risk of transmission as a result of social and religious gatherings. We saw this happening a few months ago, just after Ramadan and Eid Al Fitr in May, which led to a spike in cases in June. As a result, we approach Eid Al Adha with concern, and call for increased vigilance by both countries and communities.

WHO recommends the cancellation of social and religious gatherings related to Eid Al Adha, but any decision should be based on a standardized risk assessment, and should be part of a comprehensive approach taken by authorities to respond to the pandemic. WHO recently released guidance to countries and communities on public health measures for Eid Al Adha in the context of COVID-19.

Six months into the pandemic, the proven public health measures that remain central to the response have not changed, and have seen countries succeed in controlling COVID-19. For countries, these include testing of suspected cases; isolation of all cases; protection of health care workers; quarantine and tracing of contacts; and proper management of points of entry. If done effectively and at the right time and scale, these interventions can break the chains of transmission and stop the disease from spreading.

For the public, lifesaving personal protective measures include hand washing, respiratory hygiene, physical distancing and wearing of masks. The actions of one individual can affect the course of the pandemic in any country, and even beyond.

Many countries have opened borders and are easing social measures because of their significant economic and social impacts. If the restrictions are not lifted in a phased approach with proper epidemiological, health care and public health assessment, there is a risk of resurgence of disease activity. As a result, we are extremely concerned about the risk of further spread of COVID-19 in Africa, if countries fail to sustain an effective public health response.

Countries that have been most successful in tackling the pandemic so far have all demonstrated

strong governmental leadership, political cooperation, and close collaboration among relevant sectors. Avoiding politicization of this public health crisis allows us to focus our collective energies on what really works in controlling the disease.

Unfortunately, misinformation, misunderstanding, fear and panic continue to contribute to the spread of the disease, and undermine peoples' ability to make informed decisions. When communicating with their populations, governments must be clear, truthful, transparent and compassionate.

We all know by now the measures that need to be taken to protect ourselves and our communities. Let us remember that every action we take as individuals in the coming weeks can determine the course of the pandemic in Africa, and beyond.

Finally, let me convey my warmest wishes to you all as we approach one of our most important Muslim holidays. While we all are burdened by the COVID-19 outbreak, the festive season presents us with an opportunity to reflect on the blessings we all have – which always are more numerous than our trials. Eid Mubarak to you all.

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