

# **26th Conference of the WOAHA Regional Commission for Africa Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 4 to 7 February 2025**

## **Opening Speech by WOAHA Deputy Director General**

Your Excellency, Mr Temesgen Tiruneh, Deputy Prime Minister of Ethiopia,

Your Excellency, Dr Girma Amente, Minister of Agriculture of Ethiopia,

Your Excellency, Dr Fikru Regassa, State Minister for Livestock and Fisheries Resources Development Sector and WOAHA Delegate of Ethiopia,

Dr Huyam Salih, Director of the Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) in representation of the Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Environmental Sustainability of the African Union Commission,

Dr Susana Pombo, President, WOAHA World Assembly of DelegatesM,

Dr Honoré Robert N'lemba Mabela, President of the Regional Commission for Africa,

Delegates of the World Organisation for Animal Health Regional Commission for Africa,

Representatives of International and Regional Organisations

Dear colleagues,

Distinguished Participants,

It is a real privilege to be back in Africa for the 26<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Regional Commission. It is also an honour to represent Dr Emmanuelle Soubeyran, WOAHA Director General, who is unfortunately unable to join us due to unforeseen circumstances. She sends her warmest greetings to all participants. She also expresses her sincere appreciation to Ethiopia for their generous hospitality in hosting this important regional meeting.

It is with great enthusiasm that I welcome you all to the most important WOAHA event in the region. Regional Conferences have a special meaning for me. When I started my journey at WOAHA Headquarters as Head of the Regional Activities Department, I was responsible for overseeing the organisation of these conferences in all regions. My last Regional Conference in Africa was in February 2019 in Hammamet, Tunisia, too long ago! These Conferences have always represented to me the best opportunity for exchanges and collaboration at regional level.

I am also honoured to address you today in my new capacity as Deputy Director General for Institutional Affairs and Governance. As I take on this new responsibility, I will be closely following the inputs from these Regional Conferences to ensure that we consolidate achievements and address challenges together, with the Representatives, for the good of the overall WOAHA.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Ethiopia, our welcoming host for this important event, for their warm hospitality and the thoughtful preparations to provide us with this ideal setting for our Conference.

It is indeed truly an honour for WOAHA to be invited to Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa, a nation rich in history, diverse traditions and vibrant culture. Ethiopia is widely regarded as one of the foundations of humanity, home to some of the oldest areas of human settlement, with a variety of climates, diverse vegetation and breathtaking landscapes. A true testament to Africa's beauty. In addition, Ethiopia is the proud host to the headquarters of the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), underscoring its vital role as a hub for regional and international cooperation.

I have no doubt that this conference will be a remarkable platform for meaningful discussion, exchange of ideas and collaboration that will shape the future of our organisation to ensure that we are even more responsive to the needs of our Members, to your needs.

This conference is a unique opportunity for you, as WOAHA Delegates and WOAHA partners, to engage directly with all the WOAHA community on matters of national and regional interest. Your insights and contributions are essential to ensure that the issues most relevant to your region be given the attention they deserve.

The agenda for this week reflects your regional priorities, including two key technical items previously selected by the Regional Commission. One of the Technical Items will be on Contagious bovine pleuropneumonia - CBPP" - which remains a major animal health concern in Africa, affecting livestock owners, especially in arid regions, and hampering trade. The other Technical Item to be debated this week is "on market unification at the continental level", which will allow us to reflect on the importance of addressing the challenges of food safety and Veterinary Services, both of which are critical for sustainable trade and public health.

The agenda will also give the opportunity to show Delegates the new PVS Pathway information system and how to take advantage of all the data available for strategic planification, advocacy and fund-raising purposes. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all Delegates to prioritise the implementation of the recommendations from the PVS missions. These recommendations provide you with the best pathway for bringing your Veterinary Services in compliance with WOAAH standards. Moreover, many resources partners recognise the PVS results as an important source of information guiding their investments.

It is the case of the Pandemic Fund established in 2022 to strengthen global preparedness and response to pandemics, for which the third call for proposals was launched in last December. WOAAH will provide you with all the relevant information and I invite you to reach out to your respective WOAAH Representatives. Moreover, during the week, you will also hear the example of Gambia and its journey towards Zero by 2030, and I urge you to take decisive and appropriate action to ensure the elimination of human deaths from dog-transmitted rabies by 2030, a milestone that is now just five years away. Namibia and Zambia have received WOAAH endorsement of their official control programmes, so I take this opportunity to encourage other Members to apply. WOAAH endorsement provides international quality assurance of national efforts and signals your commitment to eliminating rabies as a public health issue, helping to leverage national and international resources.

Another milestone five years away is the eradication of PPR. Yesterday, most of you attended the official launch of the Pan African PPR Eradication Programme and the related EU support initiative. This event provided an opportunity to present the programme, promote regional coordination and advocate for resources mobilisation, at all levels, to strengthen control and eradication efforts, increase political commitment and improve harmonisation at continental level. Let's engage together in reaching this milestone!

Esteemed WOAAH Members,

WOAH remains fully committed to serving its 183 Members with dedication and integrity. We will continue to raise the profile of animal health and Veterinary Services and ensure that their vital role in global health governance is recognised. Strengthening Veterinary Services through training, capacity building and targeted support under the PVS Pathway remains a priority. In

addition, our Director General is committed to modernising the organisation and adapting its programmes to better meet your needs.

However, to continue this vital work, we need you, our Members!

In order to fulfil its mission in a sustainable way, WOAAH needs that its Members be engaged with the Organisation by actively participating in the standard setting process, implementing WOAAH international standards, notifying diseases, benefiting from WOAAH official recognition procedures and self-declarations for diseases freedom, attending statutory events and being involved in the strategy of the organisation.

WOAH also needs that Members ensure leadership at national level so that the animal health sector be well involved in the One Health Agenda, that responsibilities regarding One Health be well shared between the relevant parties, and contribution of the Veterinary Services to global health be well recognised by other relevant actors.

Last but not least, we also need your financial commitment.

The financial sustainability of our organisation depends on the statutory contributions of its Members. WOAAH funding system is designed to be flexible, allowing each Member to determine the category in which they want to contribute. However, it is imperative that all Members meet their financial obligations in a timely manner. This year, several Members from Africa were unable to vote due to outstanding arrears, a situation that is detrimental not only to the region but also to the Organisation as a whole. I therefore urge you, dear Members, to review your respective financial situation and to engage with your national authorities and WOAAH to find the best solutions for reengaging financially with the Organisation. Your financial commitment is essential to ensure that WOAAH can continue fulfilling its mission and, overall, meeting the needs of all Members.

I would also like to say a few words to our partners including our donors, with whom collaboration is crucial. Partnerships are essential in addressing global health challenges and WOAAH remains committed to strengthening collaboration with partners. As a leader in animal health, WOAAH is committed to working with partners, particularly at the regional level, to advocate effectively with decision-makers to improve Veterinary Services. Together we can drive meaningful change while respecting our respective mandates and avoiding duplication of effort.

Dear Delegates, Dear participants,

I wanted to take the opportunity to also provide you with a short reference to some global WOAHA activities in which Africa will be actively involved in the coming year.

The year 2025 will be quite structuring for WOAHA with two important initiatives being undertaken. During last General Session, the Assembly adopted a resolution calling for the revision of WOAHA's governance, and more precisely its Basic Texts. This member-driven initiative started its work last week with the first meeting of what we call the Governance Review Committee. This Committee is composed of 16 WOAHA Member from all Regions, including four from Africa: Kenya, Senegal, South Africa, and Tunisia. I would like to commend these Members for their commitment and also the Bureau of the Regional Commission for having led the identification of these already active members. The Committee decided to nominate Dr Modisane as Chair of the overall Committee. I invite you to support your four members to this Committee to ensure your regional perspective be well-reflected in the new governance of the Organisation.

The development of the 8<sup>th</sup> Strategic Plan will also start in 2025. We are currently working on the most inclusive and efficient way to capture regional inputs to the plan. You will be informed in due time regarding your involvement.

Strengthening cooperation is key, and I encourage you to use this week to build strong relationships and drive meaningful change in animal health.

I once again extend my sincere gratitude to the Government of Ethiopia, the Ministry of Agriculture, and our Ethiopian colleagues for their warm welcome and excellent hospitality.

I wish us all a successful Conference and a pleasant stay in Addis Abeba.