

26th Conference of the Regional Commission for Africa

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 4–7 February 2025

Dr. Susana Guedes Pombo, President of the World Assembly of Delegates

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Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Representatives of International and Regional Organisations, Esteemed Colleagues,

It is a great honour for me, as President of the World Assembly of Delegates, to address you today and to warmly welcome you to the 26th Conference of the Regional Commission for Africa.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Government of Ethiopia for its generosity in hosting this important event and to the WOAHAfrica team for their commitment and dedication in preparing what promises to be an insightful and impactful gathering. Holding this conference at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) Conference Centre, here in Addis Ababa, a city that symbolises African unity and cooperation, highlights the importance of our collective efforts in addressing regional challenges.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge **Dr. Honoré Robert N'lemba Mabela**, President of the Regional Commission for Africa, and all members of the Bureau for their leadership and contributions in guiding the work of the Commission. Your efforts in strengthening regional cooperation and advancing animal health priorities across Africa are highly commendable.

This conference provides us with a unique opportunity to address both the challenges and opportunities facing Veterinary Services across Africa—a continent rich in biodiversity and economic potential, but also one that faces significant animal health threats, trade barriers, and food security concerns.

The agenda for this week reflects the complexity of our work and the extent of our responsibilities.

This conference brings together experts, policymakers, and stakeholders to address critical challenges and opportunities for strengthening Veterinary Services across the continent.

The agenda underscores the urgent need to modernize and **reinforce** the resilience of Veterinary Services, ensuring they can effectively respond to emerging threats while maintaining their **essential** role in **food security, trade, and public health**.

Our discussions will focus on **critical priorities**, including the control and eradication of **Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP)**, the fight against **Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR)**, the contribution of Veterinary Services to **food and nutrition security**, and the increasing significance of **Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) in animal health governance**.

A key focus of our discussions will be the modernisation and strengthening of Veterinary Services. The role of Veterinary Services is evolving rapidly, and we must ensure that they remain resilient, well-equipped, and supported by the latest knowledge and technologies to protect animal and public health. This is particularly relevant as Africa advances towards greater regional integration through initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). Safe and fair trade in animals and animal products is essential for economic growth, but it requires strong veterinary health systems built on WOAHA standards and science-based policies.

However, these challenges cannot be tackled in isolation. The active engagement of all Members is crucial. Your voices must be heard, your priorities reflected, and your concerns addressed. By participating in WOAHA statutory events—such as this Regional Conference and the General Session—you contribute to shaping policies that respond effectively to regional needs. Your commitment to engaging with WOAHA, sharing best practices, and fostering collaboration with partners is key to our collective success.

As President, I strongly encourage each of you to take an active role in discussions, share your national experiences, and work together to develop regional solutions. The recommendations we formulate here will be crucial in guiding WOAHA's work in Africa over the coming years, ensuring that the organisation remains an effective and responsive partner to its members.

I trust that this week will serve not only as an opportunity for technical exchanges but also as a moment to strengthen the bonds of cooperation and solidarity that unite us as a global veterinary community.

I wish you all an inspiring and productive conference. May our discussions lead to meaningful progress, impactful decisions, and a renewed commitment to advancing animal health and welfare across Africa and on a global scale.

Thank you.