

# WEST AFRICAN HEALTH SECTOR UNIONS NETWORK

(WAHSUN)

Telephone: + 233 302 666705  
Fax: +233 302 662766  
Email: [netwahsun@gmail.com](mailto:netwahsun@gmail.com)  
Dept: Administration



NATIONAL GRNMA SECRETARIAT  
P. O. BOX GP 2994  
ACCRA, GHANA

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## **WAHO DAY 2022: WAHSUN CALLS FOR CONCERTED EFFORTS AT STRENGTHENING UNIVERSAL PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS IN WEST AFRICA, AS BEDROCK OF HEALTH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS**

The West African Health Sector Unions Network salutes the West African Health Organization (WAHO), on its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We recall the establishment of WAHO as a Specialized Institution of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on 9th July 1987.

The overarching objective of WAHO at its inception, which was to enable “the attainment of the highest possible standards and protection of the health of the peoples in the sub-region through the harmonization of the policies of the Members States, pooling of resources and cooperation with one another” is more relevant today than ever before in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The West African Health Sector Unions Network (WAHSUN) since its inception on 9th November, 2008, has consistently called for improved public funding of public services and delivery of quality and safe health in all ECOWAS Member States for the achievement of quality public services and the attainment of Universal Health Coverage in West Africa. Inadequate budgetary allocation for health by virtually all the governments of almost all WAHO Member States has resulted in ill-equipped and grossly understaffed health care facilities within the sub region.

Although there is a pressing need to scale up funding of health as a central plank of the pandemic response, no single West African country expended up to 10% of its annual budget on health within the past few years despite the fact that heads of states of West Africa, as with all other parts of our great continent, committed to setting aside 15% of their budgetary provision for health in the *Abuja Declaration* of 2001,

While we were not totally unscathed, it cannot be denied that Africa was spared the worst of the impact of the Covid-19 virus and knowing the parlous state of the health care systems in our countries we can only thank God for this. We cannot afford to be complacent because we might not be that lucky when the next pandemic hits.

When we look around the world, countries with stronger universal public health systems have been able to better weather the COVID-19 storm. We have to draw inspiration and lessons from their experiences and therefore call on ECOWAS Member States to be on the frontline of the global discourse to shape the post-COVID-19 world, whilst continuing standing up for an equitable transcendence of COVID-19 as a

pandemic. We need to be bold putting forward our concerns for inclusion in the envisaged World Health Organization “Pandemic Treaty” as the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body ramps up consultations.

These concerns include, the need for suspension of intellectual property rights on “pandemic products” to be triggered by the declaration of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHIEC). We also need to highlight the importance of international solidarity as the cornerstone of international relations and putting a stop to International financial institutions offering loan facilities that constrict the fiscal policy space of governments.

WAHO has a great opportunity as well as the responsibility at this hour and so WAHSUN would like to urge WAHO and its Member States to rise up to the demands of the moment and of history. WAHSUN as an organisation of health sector trade unions, with its members as health sector workers, believe we can all together build quality public health care systems for all, and build stronger Member States of WAHO and a stronger West African Health Sector Unions Network.



**Perpetual Ofori-Ampofo (FWACN, FGCNM)  
CHAIRPERSON, WAHSUN**