



ENGLISH

## **Speech by João Lourenço at the Conference on the Global Impact of Vaccines**

Delivered, Wednesday (14/06/2023), in the Conference on the Global Impact of Vaccines, held in Madrid, Kingdom of Spain.

-Excellency José Manuel Albares, Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain;

-Excellency Professor José Manuel Durão Barroso, President of the GAVI Council

-Excellency, Dr Catherine Russell, Executive Director of UNICEF

-Excellency, Dr Seth Berkley, Executive Director of GAVI

Allow me, first of all, to address a word of appreciation to His Excellency Pedro Sanchez for organizing this important event hosted by the Spanish Government, during which we will have the opportunity to address a very relevant issue linked to the global impact of vaccination on disease prevention to save lives and defend global health.

I thank you for having done me the honour of addressing all those present at this Conference, in which, in a way, recognition is given to Angola for the role it has sought to play with zeal and dedication in the noble cause of saving lives, as occurred during the most critical period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would also like to highlight the great role that GAVI has played, thanks to the strong leadership and dynamism that His Excellency Durão Barroso has instilled in the organisation's operation, in order to successfully carry out its duties in collaboration with the World Health Organisation, UNICEF and other partners and donors who, individually or collectively, have spared no effort to mobilise human, financial and material resources so that all those involved could effectively carry out their mission of bringing vaccines to the most remote areas of Angola and various countries around the world.

Since cooperation with the Republic of Angola began, GAVI has been financing initiatives aimed at strengthening the national health system, contributing to the expansion of vaccination coverage to all areas of the national territory and to the introduction of new vaccines to combat diseases that have a greater impact on our people, especially pneumonia and meningitis.

I must stress that the Government of Angola unequivocally values the contribution GAVI has made to our country, which has made it possible for us to implement health policies that prioritise vaccination protection for the population, with special attention to children, bearing in mind that Angola is a country with a large child and youth population.

I would like to highlight the significant successes we achieved in Angola by successfully transitioning GAVI support in 2017, thanks to our commitment to continue funding all routine

vaccines. This transition demonstrated our dedication to sustaining our immunisation programme independently and ensuring that children continue to receive life-saving vaccines.

As we all know, humanity faced one of the greatest challenges of all times, the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a very negative impact on the economic and social spheres throughout the world, as the African continent and Angola in particular were no exception, which also affected the provision of health services, having caused a reduction in routine vaccination coverage, as has happened in various parts of the globe, especially in developing countries.

Angola is accelerating the recovery and progress of routine vaccination to achieve universal immunisation coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals, aware that vaccination is a common good and a right for every child.

We are committed to tackling the backlog in routine immunisation with support from GAVI, to identifying and vaccinating children with zero doses, which increased significantly during the pandemic.

An analysis of data from the first four months of 2023 indicates a positive trend in routine vaccine availability and an increase in immunisation coverage for all antigens compared to the previous year.

This encouraging progress can be attributed to the concerted efforts that Angola has undertaken to mitigate the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic by integrating routine vaccination into the COVID-19 vaccination campaigns.

By prioritising this crucial aspect of healthcare, we are working diligently to ensure that individuals receive the necessary vaccines and that immunisation services are expanded to reach everyone, everywhere.

In our fight against the pandemic of COVID-19, we would like to thank you in advance for the international solidarity and recognition for the measures taken by Angola and the results achieved.

As soon as WHO informed the world of the existence of a new, deadly and highly transmissible virus that soon took on pandemic proportions, the country immediately activated the emergency system and set up the Multisectoral Commission for the Prevention and Combating of COVID-19, which coordinated the actions established in the Contingency Plan and adjusted the measures to the epidemiological situation.

It was a demanding and complex period for the National Health System, in which we had to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in an unprecedented emergency scenario that put the population's lives at risk, reduced livelihoods and affected the provision of social services, particularly health and education, and compromised the national production structure.

The health system did not collapse at any time due not only to the rapid response, but also to assertive and coordinated containment measures, despite the fact that we still have sporadic cases, low transmission and no deaths for over four months. Since the start of the pandemic, we have had up to 6 June this year 105,887 confirmed cases, with 1,936 deaths.

To respond to COVID-19, the capacity for case management was strengthened with a considerable increase in the number of hospital beds, intensive care units, clinical laboratories, imaging equipment and haemodialysis units.

Epidemiological and laboratory surveillance was reinforced with a daily testing capacity of up to 15,000 tests between ELISA and RT-PCR. Huge investment was made in the recruitment of new professionals into the National Health Service and in the training of human resources, improving biosafety conditions and ensuring the continuity of health service provision to the entire population.

There was no incapacitation of the health system during the four major epidemic waves that occurred in the period 2020-2022. During the last wave in January 2022, caused by the Omicron variant, we saw increased transmissibility but lower lethality.

Angola has been in the front line in the fight against COVID-19 with the support of the COVAX initiative, to whom I would like to once again express our deepest thanks. In March 2021 we began the implementation of the National Vaccination Plan against COVID-19, having mobilised millions of doses of vaccines with a major investment by the Government, the COVAX initiative and bilateral partners, such as the Government of Spain and other countries, to whom once again we express our thanks.

The cold chain was strengthened and expanded, with the construction of a central vaccine warehouse with several conservation, freezing and ultra-freezing chambers. An investment in digital transformation was made with the development of an individual vaccination registration platform that allows real-time monitoring of vaccination at national level and digital management of vaccine stocks at the three levels of the health system.

In order to achieve this goal, High Performance Vaccination Posts (PVAR) were created, taking advantage of existing infrastructures such as schools, sports halls and others throughout the country, equipped with a cold chain to vaccinate up to 9,000 people/day in each post during periods of high demand, when we reached figures of 200,000 thousand people per day at national level. This organisation ensured efficient administration and management of vaccines, enabling streamlined quality operations and better monitoring.

We had the support of the Armed Forces in logistics and the Education sector in the organisation and implementation of the vaccination campaign, which facilitated the work and increased its effectiveness, ensuring the vaccination of our population.

Despite the numerous challenges posed by the limited healthcare infrastructure and the vast geographical extension of our country, Angola has made remarkable progress in the administration of the vaccines against COVID-19.

More than 25 million doses of vaccine were successfully administered, an achievement that demonstrates our unwavering dedication. At this time and as part of the flexible vaccination against COVID-19, we took advantage of the experience and integrated this vaccine into routine vaccination posts. This process has also been assured not only by the health units, but also by the mobile teams.

Even more commendable is the fact that we have achieved 84% coverage with at least one dose of the vaccine among our eligible population, which signals our commitment to safeguarding the health and well-being of our citizens.

We take this occasion to recognise the hard work and determination of our health professionals, Defence and Security Forces and partners, who have tirelessly risen to the complexities and logistical challenges of delivering the vaccines to as many people as possible.

The Angolan Executive is firmly committed and engaged in ensuring the sustainability of the vaccination programme, especially with regard to routine vaccination.

Since 2017, the Angolan State has taken responsibility for maintaining the routine vaccination programme independently, investing around US\$25 million annually in the purchase of vaccines, as a guarantee that citizens have access to the vaccines needed for a healthy life.

Partnerships with GAVI and other Alliance partners, such as WHO and UNICEF, are critically important for health in Angola, Africa and the world. These organisations provide essential

support in the procurement of medicines, vaccines and cold chain equipment, ensuring the continuity and success of public health programmes.

The reality of our country that we have sought to mirror highlights the achievements attained, the challenges faced and the efforts under way in the area of immunisation in Angola, highlighting the Angolan Government's commitment to well-being and health for all Angolans.

**Your Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

The Government of Angola will maintain the same dedication in carrying out the immunisation policy that it has been consistently implementing, in the case of routine vaccination and for the past three years with regard to COVID-19.

In this task of immunising our populations, particularly our children, we will continue to rely on the contribution of all our partners, among which we highlight GAVI, WHO, UNICEF and others who are providing us with extremely important assistance for which we are grateful.

I thank you once again for your attention and for having chosen Angola, through me, to talk about your experience during the most critical period in the fight against the pandemic of COVID-19.

**Thank you very much**