

Dr Tedros Adhanom: New WHO Director General

The 69th World Health Assembly elected Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus of Ethiopia, as the 8th Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) on May 24th 2017. He succeeded Dr Margaret Chan, who held the position for the last ten years (two terms), at the helm of the world's top health agency. When he assumed office on July 1st, 2017, for the start of his five-years term, Dr Tedros became the first African to hold this position.

Dr Tedros emerged as the front runner in the tightly contested race, beating five other candidates to the post. His accomplishments both in Ethiopia and the global stage catapult him to this remarkable success.

In Ethiopia, he served as the head of the Tigray Regional Health Bureau between 2001 -2003, during which he contributed to a 22.3% reduction in HIV/AIDS prevalence in the region and 68.5% reduction in Malaria. Under his leadership as the Federal Minister of Health period 2005-2008, the Ethiopian Ministry of Health challenged disease burden, poverty, poor infrastructure, and a declining global economic situation, to register significant progress in health indicators especially the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In his tenure, Ethiopia was considered by the United Nations as a "success story" in achieving the MDGs.

Dr Tedros moved to the global stage when, in November 2012, he was appointed the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, during which he demonstrated excellent leadership, negotiation, consensus building and conflict management skills. He served as the chair of the executive council of the African Union (AU) in 2014 and oversaw the AU adoption of its First Ten Year Implementation Plan for Agenda 2063 – a roadmap for achieving a prosperous Africa based on inclusive and sustainable growth, which has placed health as its focus and lynchpin.

The new WHO Director General has been very influential in different global health initiatives. He served as the Chair of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership from 2007 – 2009, Board Chair of Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria from 2009- 2011 and member of the Programme Coordinating Body for UNAIDS from 2009 – 2010, among others.

Named as one of the 50 people who will change the world in 2012, and one of the most influential Africans for the year 2015, Dr Tedros many professional awards, notably, the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Humanitarian Award conferred by the US National Foundation of Infectious Diseases in 2011 and the Women Deliver Award for Perseverance for his tireless efforts to improve the lives of women and girls at the fourth Women Deliver Conference on May 19, 2016.

Dr Tedros' relationship with South Sudan is well established. As the Minister of Health, he initiated the collaboration between South Sudan and Ethiopia which resulted in many health officials exchange visits as well as the postgraduate medical training for South Sudanese professionals in Ethiopian universities. Diplomatically, as a minister of foreign affairs, he was a key player in Ethiopia's strategic regional interventions and mediation particularly in South Sudan, Sudan and Somalia.

Dr Tedros is a change agent, and a reformist in the health sector. His election as the Director General of WHO brings along a lot of expectations for a better health agenda in a challenging time of extraordinary health threats, outbreaks, pandemics, antibiotic-resistant infections, scientific trials and breakthroughs, climate change, and the unique situation for the heavy burdened third world countries which necessitates exceptional visionary leadership, unprecedented and possibly innovative approaches in order to appropriately address their health and related needs.

The SSMJ wishes Dr Tedros well in his new assignment.

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