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Marianne Tabi, international UN Volunteer Communication and Media Specialist at WHO in Congo during the Blue Room Talk.

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Celebrating volunteers of the Africa Women Health Champions initiative and beyond on IVD

The Africa Women Health Champions initiative is a partnership of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme and the World Health Organization (WHO). To commemorate two years of the initiative, and mark International Volunteer Day, a ceremony was held on 5 December 2022 at the WHO Regional Office for Africa in Brazzaville.

The event was attended by government officials and UN agency representatives, with 50 people participating in person and 79 online.

In his welcome address, Dr Ali Ahmed Yahaya spoke, representing the WHO Africa Regional Director. He commended the efforts and commitment of volunteers to achieve WHO's mandate and their involvement with communities to improve public health systems in Africa.

During a blue room talk, two UN Volunteers deployed in Congo under the initiative recounted their volunteer journey before and within the UN system. Chidinma Opoko and Marianne Tabi reminded participants that volunteering is, above all, a life commitment.

“ My position as a female UN Volunteer and public health professional has been a unique experience. I have been able to gain hands-on experience, while connecting with leaders and peers, both in and out of the health field. It is very rewarding to see the impact of my service, both in the country and in the community. --Chidinma Opoko, UN Volunteer Technical Officer for Tobacco and other risk factors for non-communicable diseases, WHO Regional Office in Brazzaville

The Director of Cabinet of the Ministry of Youth delivered an opening statement praising the long-standing partnership between WHO and the Congolese government. He recognized the joint efforts of WHO and UNV to promote youth employability in Africa. He also called upon young people to mobilize and volunteer to contribute to the development of communities, especially the most vulnerable.

The celebration also hosted a hybrid all-female high-level panel on the theme: Women and Youth Contributing to Public Health in Africa. This was moderated by Ms Ishata Conteh, Head of Emergency Health at WHO in the region. Speakers included Matavel Piccin, Regional Director of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and Aissata De, UN Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative in The Gambia.

The speakers shared their experiences, challenges and achievements as women involved in health in Africa. In the question-and-answer session that followed the presentations, they shared tips on how to improve women's work experience, so they are better enabled to build their careers and manage their work-life balance.

The event concluded with the presentation of awards and certificates to the winners of the contests for best story, best video and best photo, all of which showcased the work of women volunteers in the Africa Women Health Champions initiative.

“ These young volunteers have shown that they have the experience, enthusiasm and innovative spirit to make a difference in our society and environment. --Opia Mensah Kumah, UNDP Resident Representative in Congo

Today, 111 UN Volunteers of 34 different nationalities are deployed with WHO in 47 countries in Africa, geared to become the next generation of health leaders on the

continent.



East and Southern Africa

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