

JULIETTE TUAKLI

Mercy Ships International Diplomatic Ambassador for Africa, former Clinical Professor in Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School, Founder and former Medical Director of CHILD Accra in Ghana

Michel Kazatchkine, Special Advisor to the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe

We will now turn to Juliette, to bring us a perspective from the African continent but also to remind us that when we talk about the global effort in global health, it is not only about the public sector, it is also about moving forward with public/private partnerships.

Juliette Tuakli

Good morning and thank you, Thierry, for the invitation to return to the WPC, which is another opportunity to be amongst colleagues and friends again.

Africa comprises 55 countries, each with their unique challenges, opportunities and health issues, so I cannot speak about the whole continent but perhaps, I can allude to certain trends that are occurring, that are consistent and that have been recognized as effective. Michel mentioned earlier how after the pandemic we found ourselves in a really rather sorry state and I am glad to say that we have shaped up our CDCs. We have five CDCs on the continent, they have become more proactive and recently, for example, in Sierra Leone there has been an initiative where health workers and other targeted personnel are receiving Ebola vaccines. It is never enough, and we only have 20,000 in operation at the moment from over 500,000 in the world stockpile. As a result of persistent viral hemorrhagic diseases in Rwanda, for example, a vaccination process is currently underway targeting healthcare workers especially. Some of our cultural practices are still underappreciated and I say that to mean that we do not always institutionally remember our traditional health personnel, who are in fact, often the first people sick people will go to with various visits, or after they have not been cured by other methods. We need to keep a greater sensitivity of our cultural mores regarding health and health treatments. We still also have the problem on the continent of access to sanitation and clean water, which came up earlier and unfortunately, that tends to impact gastric diseases such as cholera, so we need to build out infrastructure as well as our health processes.

However, there is a growing consensus that there has been a significant shift from the burden of communicable diseases to non-communicable diseases, the NCDs and rates of stroke, diabetes and cancer are currently soaring, even in the poorest countries on the continent. This has created a demand for safe surgical care that has reached unprecedented levels. Securing funding for surgical care has proven to be a bit more difficult than receiving funding for more communicable diseases, obviously because of the acute nature of infections. However, some very positive movements are occurring that are very positive. There was recently a pivotal pan-

African surgical healthcare forum in Kigali that brought together health ministers and professionals from all over the continent and a consensus was reached by 40 governments. They committed to advancing the development of three major objectives, a comprehensive continent-wide surgical healthcare policy; national and regional programs aimed at strengthening health systems and the health workforce; and a ministerial surgery consensus statement that has been submitted to the African Union for adoption and implementation at continent level.

Such significant regional and national surgical consensus-building tends to dovetail seamlessly with an equally important private initiative that has been spearheaded by Mercy Ships International, the world's largest maritime hospital ship based in African countries. Following an extensive WHO-supported baseline assessment funded by MSI, in 2022, this international faith-based NGO conducted a comprehensive study across 28 African nations. The findings resulted in the creation of a groundbreaking roadmap aimed at accelerating safe surgical obstetrics and anesthetic care across the continent over the next decade. As you can see, this slide shows the proportion of people on the continent of Africa without access to safe, affordable surgery.

The catalyst for this ambitious plan was launched in 2022 as the Dakar Declaration by Macky Sall, the former Senegalese President. However, the actual catalyst was the Lancet Commission's *Global Surgery* report of 2015, which highlighted the severe impact of inadequate access to safe surgical care on Africa's population. Much like the 2024 meeting that was held in Kigali, chaired by Rwanda's Health Minister, the Dakar Declaration emphasized the importance of regional collaboration and inter-regional partnerships in providing access to safe surgical care. Over 50% of Africa's health ministers and heads of state have already expressed their support for this transformative initiative.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of these new initiatives is a growing emphasis on public/private and private/private partnerships, which are enhancing national and regional priorities. For example, in West Africa we have had private, indigenous and diasporan groups partnering to establish energy efficient, climate resilient oxygen supply plants for various health facilities. The facilities use solar powered storage and distribution systems to ensure a continuous, reliable power source for surgical care in both urban and rural areas. Another private group has developed a groundbreaking approach using phospholipid nanoparticles as a substitute for blood, aiming in the management of septic shock and postpartum hemorrhage, which are two of the continents leading causes of mortality, especially amongst women.

I believe that Mercy Ships provides an exemplary model of surgical and medical care, offering the African nations it serves an innovative form of private health financing. Of recent note, we have engaged with the African Union's development arm, NEPAD, and we are now underway exploring a range of innovative financing strategies for deepening our health resilience on the continent. Furthermore, I believe that efforts to reduce mortality from non-communicable diseases and address the surgical consequences present a forward-thinking approach to preventive healthcare on the continent. Prevention is not just about avoiding disease, which is important, it is also about building healthier, more resilient communities on the continent. It is my hope that the Mercy Ships' partnerships with the African Union through NEPAD, will play a



crucial role in complementing both private and government-led initiatives on the continent of Africa.