

COMMUNIQUÉ ISSUED AT THE END OF THE AFRICAN VIROLOGY CONFERENCE (AVC) HELD IN ABUJA, 25TH TO 27TH NOVEMBER, 2024

The 2nd biennial African Virology Conference (AVC) was held at the Exclusive Serene Hotel, Abuja, from Monday, November 25th, to Thursday, November 27th, 2024. The conference, themed “Trends in Emerging and Re-emerging Viruses,” brought together experts, researchers, and stakeholders to address pressing virology challenges and opportunities on the continent. The conference was supported by various organizations, including Ahmadu Bello University, the Bank of Industry, WHO, NICRAT, NCDC, the National Universities Commission, Inqaba Biotech, Allot Nig. Ltd, BSPP, Cambridge-Africa, and others.

The event commenced with a warm welcome from the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) Chairperson, Prof. Maryam Aminu, followed by inspiring remarks from the African Virologists Network (AVN) Chair, Prof. Theophilus Adiku, and goodwill messages from distinguished personalities, including Dr. Jide Idris, Director General of the Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC); Dr. Walter Kazadi Mulombo, WHO Country Representative; and Prof. Abdulrazak Shaukat, Director of the Technical Cooperation Division for Africa, International Atomic Energy Agency, Vienna, Austria.

In his opening address, Prof. Adiku emphasized the urgent need for enhanced government and private sector support to bolster AVN’s activities, including funding for research, capacity building, and laboratory networks. He appealed to policymakers and institutions to partner with the AVN to ensure Africa’s voice is integral in shaping global virology priorities. Prof. Adiku also urged senior virologists to mentor young researchers and expand membership to secure the future of virology in Africa.

Prof. Maryam Aminu, Dean of the Faculty of Life Sciences at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, highlighted the conference’s broader goals, including fostering collaborations, empowering African scientists, and forging global partnerships. She reiterated that the conference was about knowledge sharing, building bridges and empowering African scientists to lead on the global stage.

Renowned virologist and public health expert, Prof. Oyewale Tomori, called for a paradigm shift in addressing Africa’s developmental challenges, emphasizing the importance of homegrown solutions over foreign aid dependency.

The WHO Country Representative in Nigeria, Dr. Walter Kazadi Mulombo, underscored the critical role of robust surveillance systems and collaboration in addressing emerging and re-emerging viral threats.

The keynote lecture, titled “HIV Cure Research: State of the Science and the Need to Include African Patients and Scientists,” was delivered by Prof. George Boateng, who highlighted advancements in HIV cure research, the current challenges, and the urgent need to prioritize Africa in global research efforts.

Over 150 attendees participated in the conference, with 120 oral and poster presentations delivered during the technical sessions, covering various sub-themes of the conference. These were

complemented by plenary lectures from seasoned African virologists, who emphasized the need for localized solutions to tackle virology challenges on the continent. A key session was the roundtable discussion on Monkeypox (Mpox), which explored strategies for continental preparedness and response. This session highlighted the importance of collaboration and support in addressing emerging viral threats.

The conference awarded outstanding student presenters: Jonathan Klutse (1st), Waleola Rachael Odususi (2nd), and Nancy Enimil (3rd) for Oral Presentations; Ogudu Emmanuel Ogbonnia (1st), Yeena Tay (2nd), and Vanessa Magnusan and Akande Damilola Busayo (joint 3rd) for Poster Presentations. Guest speakers also received certificates of recognition.

Resolutions of the AVN General Meeting (GM)

The Interim AVN Executive Committee, having demonstrated excellent performance, shall continue as substantive executives for the next two years, and the AVN shall continue to hold its biannual conferences as agreed.

Recommendations

1. All major virology institutions in Africa should collaborate with AVN to support future events and programs, including future AVCs.
2. Governments, government agencies, and private sector organizations should provide funding and support for AVN activities to address the viral challenges facing the continent.
3. The AVC shall intensify efforts to foster sustained collaborations, partnerships, and the inclusion of virologists from French-speaking African countries.
4. All AVC participants and virologists across the continent are strongly encouraged to register as AVN members and commit to paying annual dues.
5. Senior African virologists should fully support AVN as the umbrella body for all virologists in Africa to ensure sustained unity and continuous growth.
6. The AVN should prioritize building a robust virology research network to enhance Africa's capacity to detect, prevent, and respond to viral threats.
7. Governments and institutions should establish and strengthen regional virology centers of excellence to promote cutting-edge research and training.
8. The AVN should advocate for increased investment in local vaccine production and antiviral drug development to reduce reliance on imports during outbreaks.

Conclusion

The conference concluded with a resounding call for Africa to strengthen its preparedness for emerging and re-emerging viral threats. Through collaboration and innovation, African virologists aim to lead the charge in addressing these challenges and ensuring global health security. The venue for the next AVC will be announced shortly, and all members will be duly informed.



Prof. Theophilus Adiku
Chair, African Virologists
Network (AVN)



Prof. Maryam Aminu, FSAN
AVC 2024 LOC Chairperson
and Vice Chair, AVN



Dr. Bernard Onoja
Secretary, AVC
2024 LOC