



Health Ethics & Law
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**Key Highlights of the United Nations
General Assembly Political Declaration
on Antimicrobial Resistance**

1. Introduction

On September 26, 2024, global leaders converged at the 79th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) for a pivotal high-level meeting focused on antimicrobial resistance (AMR). This meeting culminated in a significant political Declaration aimed at addressing the urgent threat posed by AMR, which caused approximately 4.95 million human deaths in 2019.[1] The Declaration sets out ambitious targets and actions reflecting a comprehensive, multisectoral approach to combat this escalating public health crisis.

The urgency of the AMR crisis cannot be overstated. The increasing prevalence of resistant infections has significant implications for public health, economic stability, and global security. For example, common procedures such as surgeries, chemotherapy, and organ transplants, which rely on effective antibiotics to prevent and treat infections, become riskier as resistance spreads.[2] Additionally, AMR has a disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and individuals with compromised immune systems.[3]

The economic burden of AMR is staggering. The World Bank estimates that AMR could push 24 million people into extreme poverty by 2030, mainly in low- and middle-income countries.[4] Addressing AMR not only protects public health but also safeguards economic development and global stability.[5]

Africa remains one of the hardest-hit regions, leading to over 27 deaths per 100,000 people,[6] as it faces a heavy burden of resistant infections that worsen existing public health challenges.[7] In response, the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) established an AMR Task Force in 2018 to formulate strategies, coordinate regional efforts, and provide technical support to African Union member states in addressing AMR.[8] It also developed the 2020-2025 Framework for Antimicrobial Resistance Control, emphasising a One Health approach.

[1] Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting on Antimicrobial Resistance, 2024, para. 5

[2] WHO, "Antimicrobial resistance" 2023. WHO, "Antimicrobial resistance" 2023. <https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/antimicrobial-resistance>

[3] Saeed U, Insaf RA, Piracha ZZ, Tariq MN, Sohail A, Abbasi UA, Fida Rana MS, Gilani SS, Noor S, Noor E, Waheed Y, Wahid M, Najmi MH, Fazal I. Crisis averted: a world united against the menace of multiple drug-resistant superbugs -pioneering anti-AMR vaccines, RNA interference, nanomedicine, CRISPR-based antimicrobials, bacteriophage therapies, and clinical artificial intelligence strategies to safeguard global antimicrobial arsenal. *Front Microbiol.* 2023 Nov 30;14:1270018. doi: 10.3389/fmicb.2023.1270018.

[4] WORLD BANK GROUP, "DRUG-RESISTANT INFECTIONS: A Threat to Our Economic Future, 2017." <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/323311493396993758/pdf/final-report.pdf>

[5] Ibid

[6] Africa CDC, "Findings in AMR Surveillance Data Across Africa To Shape Health Policy Reform," 2023. [Add a little bit of body text reform/#:~:text=AMR%20stands%20as%20one%20of,over%2027%20deaths%20per%20100%2C000.](#)

[7] WHO, "RESIST THE RESISTANCE." [Add a little bit of body text.](#) See also "AfricaCDC, "Antimicrobial Resistance: New Report Warns of Growing Threat" 2024. [Add a little bit of body text new-report-warns-of-growing-threat/](#)

[8] Africa CDC, "Voicing African Priorities on the Active Pandemic" 2024. <https://africacdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/African-Union-AMR-Landmark-Report-.pdf>

Similar to other countries in Africa, Nigeria has been severely impacted by AMR. 20% of *Neisseria meningitidis* isolates were resistant to chloramphenicol, while 30.8% exhibited resistance to Penicillin G.[9] In response, the Nigerian government launched the National Action Plan (NAP) on AMR 2017-2022, and on 19 October 2024, it introduced the Second National Action Plan 2.0 for 2024-2028.[10]

Significant progress in reducing the impact of AMR is achievable through current measures, particularly in low and middle-income countries.[11] Studies indicate that 10% of the global issue of AMR could be mitigated by enhancing water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and increasing vaccination coverage, especially in developing countries.[12] However, the global response has been inconsistent, with a disproportionate focus on developed countries, hospital-based measures, etc., whilst minimal emphasis is placed on unregulated antibiotic usage in livestock, the role of primary care providers in developing countries and the implementation of quick diagnostic tests for identifying AMR.[13]

The Political Declaration emphasises countries' understanding of the urgency of the AMR crisis, the increased commitment of countries and the critical need for collaborative efforts and resource mobilisation necessary to combat this critical health threat effectively. Political declarations are articulations of UN Member States' commitments to particular matters and the advancement of political goals. Although they are not binding they are not without significance or weight. They signal increased attention, and coordinated action, can create momentum and support advocacy by other stakeholders for continued implementation of existing initiatives and drive impactful actions towards reducing AMR across the continent.

This Political Declaration is a follow-up to the 2016 Political Declaration of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on antimicrobial resistance. [14] In this short piece, we provide a brief overview and key highlights of the Political Declaration. 2. Major Takeaways from the UN's Landmark Declaration on AMR before the adoption of the 2024 political Declaration on AMR, the international community had already made substantial progress with the 2016 political Declaration on AMR, which underscored a coordinated, multi-sectoral response to this critical issue.[15] However, despite progress made under the 2016 Declaration, the rise of AMR has continued, with many countries struggling to meet targets amid evolving challenges and emerging infectious diseases.[16]

[9] Federal Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development, Environment and Health, "Antimicrobial Use and Resistance in Nigeria Situation Analysis and Recommendations " 2017, https://ncdc.gov.ng/themes/common/docs/protocols/56_1510840387.pdf

[10] <https://www.afro.who.int/countries/nigeria/news/nigeria-launches-action-plan-combat-antimicrobial-resistance-amr>

[11] Joseph A Lewnard, et al, Burden of bacterial antimicrobial resistance in low-income and middle-income countries avertible by existing interventions: an evidence review and modelling analysis (2024) *The Lancet* Volume 403, Issue 10442 p2439-2454

[12] Madhukar Pai, et al. "Tackling antimicrobial resistance: recognising the proposed five blind spots can accelerate progress" *The Lancet Microbe*, Volume 0, Issue 0, 100968, 2024

[13] Ibid

[14] UN General Assembly resolution 71/3 of 5 October 2016

[15] Molly Moss and Camden Malone, "Charting the Course for the AMR Agenda in 2024," UNITED NATIONS FOUNDATION 2023. <https://unfoundation.org/what-we-do/issues/global-health/global-health-resource-center-2/the-amr-agenda-in-2024/>

[16] Jayaseelan Murugaiyan, et al. "Progress in Alternative Strategies to Combat Antimicrobial Resistance: Focus on Antibiotics." *Antibiotics* 2022, 11(2), 200; <https://doi.org/10.3390/antibiotics11020200>

The 2024 Declaration was consequently adopted to intensify global efforts, address gaps in implementation, and ensure renewed commitment to combating AMR with an updated approach that reflects recent developments in healthcare and surveillance systems. This new Declaration reflects an intensified focus on practical, actionable strategies to curb AMR.

The Political Declaration 2024 sets out several key commitments and targets that reflect a unified global response to AMR:

1. **Reduction of Human Deaths:** One of the central objectives is to reduce the estimated 4.95 million deaths associated with bacterial AMR by 10% by 2030. This ambitious target underscores the urgency of addressing this public health threat and demonstrates the commitment of nations to save lives.

2. **Multinational Action Plans:** The Declaration re-emphasises the goal of ensuring that all countries have multinational action plans for addressing AMR by 2030.

3. **Sustainable Financing:** To support the implementation of national action plans on AMR, the Declaration calls for sustainable national financing, including a commitment to raise US\$100 million in catalytic funding. The goal is to ensure that at least 60% of countries have adequately funded action plans by 2030, diversifying funding sources and securing additional contributors to the Antimicrobial Resistance Multi-Partner Trust Fund.[17]

4. **One Health Approach:** The Declaration reinforces the importance of a One Health approach, which recognises the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health. It calls for coordinated efforts across sectors to tackle AMR effectively.[18]

5. **Targets for Human Health:** The Declaration establishes a commitment to significantly increase the use of antibiotics classified under the WHO Access group by 2030, aiming to surpass the global targets established for 2023. With a focus on national contexts, the goal is to ensure that at least 70% of overall human antibiotic consumption worldwide is derived from this group. This ambitious target will be supported through strategic investments and enhanced stewardship programmes across various sectors, including agriculture and animal health.

6. **Infection Prevention and Control:** To enhance infection prevention and control (IPC) measures, the Declaration stipulates that 100% of countries must have basic water, sanitation, hygiene, and waste management services in all healthcare facilities. Furthermore, 90% of countries should meet all WHO minimum requirements for IPC programmes by 2030. These measures are vital for reducing healthcare-associated infections and limiting the spread of resistant pathogens.[19]

[17] Ibid para. 36

[18] Ibid para. 46

[19] Ibid para. 62

7. Antimicrobial Use in Agriculture: Recognising the significant role of agriculture in AMR, the Declaration commits to reducing the number of antimicrobials used in agri-food systems by prioritising infection prevention measures and promoting responsible use of antimicrobials in animal health.[20] This includes implementing stricter regulations on the use of antibiotics in livestock and enhancing veterinary oversight.

8. Environmental Protection: The Declaration highlights the critical role that environmental factors play in the development and dissemination of antimicrobial resistance. It calls for urgent actions to prevent and mitigate the release of antimicrobials and their metabolites into the environment. This encompasses a broad spectrum of sectors, including sanitation and sewage management, waste disposal, healthcare, pharmaceutical manufacturing, and agricultural practices in both terrestrial and aquatic systems.

9. Multisectoral Response: The Declaration recognizes AMR as a complex issue requiring a collaborative response that combines interventions across human health, agriculture, animal health, and environmental sectors.[21] This multisectoral collaboration is essential to understand and address the diverse factors contributing to AMR.

3. Strategic Implications of the Declaration

The Political Declaration's legal significance extends beyond mere commitments; it establishes a framework for accountability and governance in the fight against AMR. Here are some crucial aspects of its legal implications:

1. Establishment of Governance Mechanisms: The Declaration formalises the role of the Quadripartite Joint Secretariat on AMR as the central coordinating mechanism for the global response to AMR.[22] This governance structure will enhance collaboration among the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

2. Global Action Plan (GAP) Update: The Declaration mandates the Quadripartite organisations, in collaboration with countries, to update the Global Action Plan on AMR by 2026.[23] This ensures that national action plans are aligned with international standards and best practices, promoting a coordinated response.

[20] Ibid para. 69

[21] Ibid paras. 17 and 25

[22] Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting on Antimicrobial Resistance, 2024, para. 26

[23] Ibid para. 25

3. Independent Evidence Panel: An independent panel for evidence against AMR will be established in 2025, following global consultations with countries.[24] This panel will provide essential guidance and support to nations in their efforts to combat AMR, thereby strengthening accountability and fostering transparency.

3. Reporting and Accountability: The Declaration calls for countries to report quality surveillance data on antimicrobial resistance and usage by 2030, using existing global systems.[25] This requirement enhances accountability and allows for better tracking of progress towards achieving the declared targets.

4. Collaboration Across Sectors: The emphasis on a One Health approach necessitates collaboration between public and private sectors, as well as academic institutions. This framework facilitates the sharing of knowledge and best practices, enhancing the overall effectiveness of AMR interventions.

5. Incentives for Research and Development: The Declaration encourages the development of financing mechanisms to stimulate multisectoral health research and innovation.[26] This framework promotes the exploration of new antimicrobials and alternative treatments, essential in the face of growing resistance.

6. Engagement of Stakeholders: The Declaration underscores the importance of involving diverse stakeholders, including civil society, healthcare professionals, academia, faith-based organisations, volunteers, farmers, survivors of antimicrobial-resistant infections, and the private sector, amongst others, in the development and implementation of AMR strategies.[27] This inclusive approach fosters collaboration and ensures that various perspectives are considered in addressing AMR.

7. Public Awareness Campaigns: The Declaration encourages countries to engage in public awareness campaigns to educate communities about the responsible use of antibiotics.[28] By promoting an understanding of AMR, these campaigns can help reduce the misuse and overuse of antibiotics among the general population.

4. Conclusion

The political Declaration made at the UNGA high-level meeting on AMR represents a significant moment in the global fight against antimicrobial resistance. By setting clear targets and committing to collaborative action, world leaders have recognised the critical need for a united response to this pressing public health challenge. The legal significance of the declaration lies not only in its commitments but also in its establishment of governance structures and mechanisms for accountability.

[24] Ibid para. 30

[25] Ibid para 99

[26] Ibid para 86

[27] Ibid para. 29

[28] Ibid para. 8

As countries advance these initiatives, sustainable financing, multisectoral collaboration, and rigorous monitoring will be paramount in achieving the ambitious goals outlined in the Declaration.

Effective action is key. For instance, national action plans on AMR must not only be developed but implemented effectively and address the identified gaps in AMR actions. Awareness campaigns must not be knee-jerk, but sustained, ongoing, gender-responsive efforts. And implementation of a multisectoral approach must not be tokenistic but institutionalized, with the relevant legal framework and capacity-building. Necessary legal agreements between sectors must be put in place to ensure data sharing and transfer as necessary to support effective action and multisectoral response. Within a multi-sectoral response, providing effective support for animal health sectors is critical. For instance, reducing the use of antibiotics in livestock can significantly decrease the likelihood of resistant bacteria entering the human food chain. In countries like Nigeria, building the capacity and awareness of the role of the environmental sector in addressing AMR continues to be an issue.

Furthermore, the collective effort to engage diverse stakeholders, promote public awareness, and invest in research and development will be crucial in turning the tide against antimicrobial resistance. Only through a coordinated and comprehensive approach can we hope to safeguard the health of future generations and ensure that effective treatments remain available for all.

As the global community responds to the challenges posed by AMR, individuals, healthcare professionals, policymakers, and organisations need to remain vigilant and proactive. The fight against AMR requires collective responsibility and a commitment to sustainable practices. Whether through supporting local initiatives, advocating for the responsible use of antibiotics, or participating in research efforts, stakeholders at all levels have a role to play in combatting this global health threat.

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