**Statement by the Government of Côte d’Ivoire (Rep.) to the April 2021 session of the Council of Administration**

Mr Chairman of the Council of Administration,

Excellencies, Ambassadors,

Director General of the International Bureau,

Deputy Director General,

Chairs and Directors General of Posts around the world,

Postal Experts and Specialists,

Distinguished Observers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like, on behalf of my country, Côte d’Ivoire, to thank you for the opportunity afforded to me to address the postal community today, at the first ordinary session of our Union’s Council of Administration in 2021.

When I took up the baton as Minister of the Digital Economy, Telecommunications and Innovation, the organ­ization of the 27th Congress was one of the key issues on my desk.

It therefore gives me great pleasure to be here today with you for this meeting session.

Mr Chairman,

It is my honour to thank you once again and to applaud your excellent leadership in guiding the work of the Council of Administration of our institution, despite the global health crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

My thanks also go to Mr Bishar Hussein, Director General, Mr Pascal Clivaz, Deputy Director General, and all the International Bureau staff, for their invaluable support to Côte d’Ivoire during the preparations for the 27th Congress.

In this regard, I would like to recognize the open and fruitful collaboration between the Congress Preparatory Committee and the International Bureau team.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You may recall that the Republic of Côte d’Ivoire was entrusted with the organization of the 27th Universal Postal Union Congress through Istanbul Congress decision C 30/2016.

Since then, the Ivorian authorities, under the direction of His Excellency Mr Alassane Ouattara, President of the Republic of Côte d’Ivoire, have shown themselves to be firmly committed to the flawless organization of this major event.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic turned our plans on their head and resulted in changes to the sched­ule of preparations for the 27th Congress.

Despite the worrying health situation, Côte d’Ivoire has, through various items of correspondence, expressed and reiterated its firm desire to hold the 27th Congress in Abidjan.

Furthermore, this commitment was endorsed at the UPU’s Extraordinary Council of Administration session, held on 26 and 27 October 2020, at which it was decided that the said Congress would be held from 9 to 27 August 2021.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Following that extraordinary session of October 2020, the organizing committee set up by the Ivorian Government resumed its activities in order to meet this new deadline. My country wishes to reassure both the International Bureau and Union member countries as to its desire and ability to fulfil its commitment of ensuring the seamless organization of Congress, while taking into account the new sanitary circumstances.

The videoconference held by the UPU International Bureau on 17 February 2021 was an opportunity to con­sider the probability of Congress being held in hybrid mode owing to the global health situation. Naturally, the social distancing measures required in view of the pandemic and the hybrid format of the 27th Congress will entail adjustments to the arrangements made with regard to accommodation, reception, access, Internet con­nectivity and other IT systems, transport, and the plenary meeting room.

It should be noted, with regard to the fight against COVID-19, that Côte d’Ivoire established an epidemiological and health oversight committee as soon as the first cases of infection were detected, in March 2020.

This oversight committee, on high alert, implemented an appropriate response plan that has served to control and contain the pandemic since its outbreak.

As to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic in Côte d’Ivoire, on 28 April 2021, the statistics stood at 45,943 confirmed cases, resulting in 45,469 recoveries and 286 deaths. The number of current cases stands at 188. It should be noted that these results are among the best in Africa and around the world, thus confirming that the pandemic is under control in Côte d’Ivoire.

With regard to COVID-19 vaccination, Côte d’Ivoire has received 554,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, including 504,000 doses through the COVAX initiative, coordinated by the World Health Organization (WHO), and 50,000 doses within the framework of cooperation between Côte d’Ivoire and India.

Since vaccination began on 1 March 2021, around 132,434 people have been vaccinated. In total, by the end of the first half of 2021, Côte d’Ivoire will have received around one million doses through the COVAX initiative. Furthermore, the Government and the oversight committee are sparing no efforts in ensuring the highest pos­sible vaccination coverage.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

So as to curb the health crisis caused by COVID-19, the National Security Council, at the suggestion of the oversight committee, has decided to implement the following measures:

* To extend the state of sanitary emergency until 30 June 2021;
* To expand vaccination to all persons aged 18 and over;
* To decentralize the vaccination campaign;
* To pursue and ramp-up awareness campaigns to ensure strict compliance with social distancing measures.

In order to break the chain of transmission of COVID-19 in Côte d’Ivoire, the National Security Council requests that the population comply strictly with social distancing measures and invites everyone in target groups to be vaccinated.

Specifically with regard to Congress, the health committee is led by the Director General of the SAMU (emer­gency medical assistance service) and the Director General of the INHP (national institute for public health), which have drawn up a health guide containing useful information. This will be available to all Congress dele­gates.

A special sanitary plan has been prepared with regard to Congress delegates, covering prominent participants, VIPs and all others taking part, including, of course, the International Bureau staff, from the moment that they land on Ivorian soil, throughout their stay and until their departure. This plan covers transport and movement within the hotels, at the Congress venue, and at all other locations frequented by the delegates.

The committee will make the necessary arrangements for on-site COVID tests if needed. The usual measures (i.e. hand gels, masks, regular disinfection) will be in force in coaches and other vehicles, hotels and meeting venues. Certain measures have already been presented to the delegation of International Bureau experts, during their evaluation visit of January 2020, and were very well received.

With regard to security, a specific plan has been devised to ensure the complete safety of all delegations during their stay (during transfers and at hotels and meeting venues). VIPs will benefit from dedicated protec­tion. These arrangements were also presented to the International Bureau delegation on its last visit, and were approved.

With regard to logistics, the Congress venue remains the Sofitel Abidjan Hotel Ivoire, as validated in the overall plan reviewed by the International Bureau in January 2020. It should be noted that, in view of social distancing measures, simulations have been conducted to determine the final capacity of the main plenary meeting room, the committee meeting rooms, and all other rooms reserved. These arrangements will be submitted for evalu­ation and approval by the International Bureau delegation that is to visit Abidjan shortly.

As to information technology, preparations so far have met with resounding approval, with provision to be made for the hybrid mode from now on. I wish to assure you that, in this regard, Côte d’Ivoire is already equipped to host Congress in any format, be that physical, hybrid or remote.

With regard to communication, it should be noted that the dedicated Congress website is up and running, and that it is currently being updated with all the necessary information relating to Congress and the associated preparations.

On the subject of accommodation arrangements, a revised reservation process will be set out in the invitation letter, so as to enable delegates to make their bookings directly with the hotels selected and accredited for the Abidjan Congress.

As for receptions and gala dinners, interested countries are invited to make themselves known and will receive assistance from the organizing committee.

The procedure with regard to visas will be simplified in order to accelerate their issuance by all of our diplomatic and consular representations. Special arrangements will also be made so that any delegates who have not obtained a visa before leaving their own country can obtain one on arrival. Reimbursement for hotel reservation costs has been provided to all those who have submitted a request to this end.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to salute the wave of solidarity and great commitment exhibited by the countries of Africa, notably through the creation of a committee to support the organization of this Congress, dubbed “Africa’s Congress”, with the slogan, “Africa invites you, Côte d’Ivoire welcomes you!”. Now is an opportune moment to thank the Secretary General of the PAPU for this initiative.

I would like, once again, to acknowledge all of the initiatives and actions undertaken to support Côte d’Ivoire in the organization of the 27th Universal Postal Congress.

I wish to conclude by expressing, loud and clear, the firm desire of the Ivorian authorities to welcome, from 9 to 27 August 2021, in Abidjan, all of the member countries of the Universal Postal Union to celebrate postal fraternity on African soil, and by wishing them, in advance, the traditional “Akwaba”.

Thank you for your kind attention.