

# EVERY AFRICAN CHILD WITH CANCER DESERVES A CHANCE: Care for all, cure for more

33<sup>rd</sup> conference of African Union – Niger 2019  
Niamey 5 – 6 July 2019

# REPORT



## African Union High Level Meeting on Cancer – 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> July 2019

Profs Laila Hessissen, SIOF Africa Continental President and Lorna Awo Renner, representing SIOF International, attended the African Union High level Meeting on Cancer in Niamey, Niger from 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> July 2019.



The Ministry of Public Health of Niger, in collaboration with the Tattali Iyalli Foundation and in partnership with WHO, UNFPA, Vaccine Alliance (Gavi) and the Alliance of Francophone, African and Mediterranean Leagues for the Fight against Cancer ( ALIAM) organized a conference of Ministers of Health in the presence of the Heads of State and First Ladies of Africa.

The theme of this meeting was "the burden of cancer in Africa" and the general objective was to ensure the commitment of political authorities and other relevant partners to prioritise the fight against cancer in African national health policies, aligned with the WHO agenda 2030.

A document was prepared by the SIOP Africa board in collaboration with Eric Bouffet (SIOP president), Kathy Pritchard Jones (President SIOP elect) and CCI representatives, entitled **"Message from the African Pediatric oncology community"**. This document was written in English and translated to French then shared by email with the African paediatric oncology teams. Each team was requested to present it to its health authorities and possibly to the first lady of its country to ensure that the same message about pediatric oncology in Africa is conveyed. The document was also printed and distributed at the Niamey meeting. It is available for download from the SIOP website (link [https://siop-online.org/sp\\_cb/africa/](https://siop-online.org/sp_cb/africa/))

**On the first day, 5th July, the "expert meeting"** was held at the Grand Hotel. It was attended by Ministers of Health and their representatives. Also present were representatives from various national and international organizations who are stakeholders in the fight against cancer. All those who attended the meeting were given copies of the Message on Childhood Cancer in Africa from SIOP Africa. An estimated 200 participants were present. The meeting was addressed by the Niger Minister of Health who gave the opening speech. The Regional Director of World Health Organization highlighted some of the policies in African countries towards integration of cancer care in the health service such as Rwanda, early detection such as Ghana and primary prevention such as Ethiopia.

The WHO representative in Niger spoke about the situation of cancers in Africa. The AU Commissioner for Social Affairs urged all to implement decisions and recommendations made at this two-day meeting. He emphasized the importance of treatment being made accessible for children. The representative from the West African Health Organization advocated for cancer drugs to be made affordable and accessible citing the approach used for HIV drugs. He also made mention of regional organization of cancer services to make quality care available. Prevention of cancers required more political will and included higher taxation of tobacco and sugary drinks.

Laila Hessissen gave a brilliant presentation, highlighting the burden of childhood cancer in Africa and the challenges that have led to the poorer outcomes in this region compared to more advanced settings. She emphasized, speaking with passion, the recommendations set forth in the message that had

been distributed to all present. A representative of the Framework Alliance Convention spoke further on funding the fight against cancer. Participants were taken through a draft of the commitment of Ministers of Health on the fight against cancer and some suggestions for improvements to the wording were made. The appeal of Niamey by the First Ladies was also read to participants. This ended the day's sessions.

**The second day's meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> July**, took place at the Palais du Congres. It was attended by thirteen first ladies and their representatives, Ministers of Health, various country delegations, international and national organizations.

The First ladies present were from Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Eswatini, Kenya, Equatorial Guinea, Benin, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo, The Gambia, and Sierra Leone. The huge hall was filled to capacity. All the First ladies received copies of the message and copies were also given to all the country delegations. The SIOP Africa Message was the main document in front of the First Ladies and they were all seen to be reading it during the meeting. Three Heads of State spoke at the meeting, stating what their countries were doing in the fight against cancer.

The meeting was addressed by the President of Niger who stated that in Niger, there was Universal Health Coverage (UHC) for children under 5 years of age which included cancer. Cancers in women were also included in UHC. The President of Burkina Faso informed the meeting about the use of the telecommunications system in his country to send out prevention of cancer messages to the population. He advocated for the African Union to get prices of diagnostic services reduced. The President of Chad was of the opinion that African Centres of Excellence for Cancer should be set up so Africans could access good care within the continent.

The first Lady of Niger, Dr Lalla Malika Issoufou addressed the meeting and urged stakeholders to act now to fight cancer. She stressed the importance of prevention campaigns. The WHO Regional Director stated that it was important to prioritize Universal Health Coverage (UHC) so as to address the issue of equity for all. Treatment should be decentralized and tackling cancer should be high priority. She mentioned that the WHO was ready to work with countries and other partners to ensure UHC was achieved. Childhood cancer was not

mentioned specifically in her address, much to our disappointment. A panel discussion was held and there were brief presentations by representatives of various organizations including the International Atomic Energy Agency who mentioned what the agency was doing to establish radiology centres in African countries.

The Director of the Hartmann Cancer Institute brought up the important issue of Africans undertaking research and establishing biobanks. The representative from BID addressed resource mobilization for the fight against cancer which included tax revenue, partnering with the private sector, effective utilization of funds, plugging loopholes and scaling up advocacy for the fight against cancer. A representative from the Dangote Foundation gave examples of how private-public partnerships can work effectively. The event ended with the appeal of Niamey from the First Ladies read on their behalf by the First Lady from Burkina Faso.

Laila and Lorna met with André Ilbawi (Medical officer, Cancer Plan WHO) and had discussions as to what role SIOP Africa could play in the Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer. The importance of SIOP members identifying their contributions as members of SIOP when representing SIOP was emphasized as there is a tendency for people to rather mention the institutions they are working in. The proposal from André Ilbawi is that the SIOP gets positioned in a particular segment such as training programs and especially the training of PO leaders in LMIC. He also proposes that SIOP be directly involved in one specific LMIC country and support WHO's initiative.

Laila Hessissen, Mhamed Harif (French African Group of Pediatric Oncology GFAOP) and Lorna Renner visited the Niamey Pediatric oncology unit and the National Cancer Centre on the 6th July. We were shown round the children's ward, the diagnostic centre, which is under construction and which will house a CT scanner, MRI machine and Linear Accelerator as well as facilities for brachytherapy.



L Renner and L Hessissen presenting the “The African message”



M Harif the GFAOP president – L Hessissen and L Renner



Visiting the Niamey National Cancer Centre

## ***Lorna Renner and Laila Hessissen***

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