



*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

**Address by**

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**to the**

**FAO/WHO TRAINING WORKSHOP ON “MICROBIOLOGICAL RISK ASSESSMENT”**

**EMRO, Cairo, Egypt, 23–25 July 2003**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the FAO/WHO Training Workshop on Microbiological Risk Assessment. I am very pleased to see so many participants from the Eastern Mediterranean Region, from a neighbouring region, and from our sister organization FAO.

Since the adoption of food safety as an essential public health function by the World Health Assembly in 2000, and the adoption by the Regional Committee of the Regional Plan of Action for Food Safety in the 21st Century in 1999, food safety is becoming a priority for national health authorities in the Region. Member States and the health sector have been called upon to play an increasing role in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, especially in the emerging area of food safety risk analysis. This will require people trained in the application of risk analysis

principles. A number of training workshops have already been organized in the Region to address the general aspects of risk analysis. The current workshop will serve as an introduction to what may well be considered the most important component of risk analysis, microbiological risk assessment.

The role of risk analysis in decision-making has a long history within FAO and WHO. Some of the earliest work of WHO in the field of food safety sought to provide decision-makers in Member States with risk-based scientific advice on important or emerging food safety issues. In 1955, the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives met for the first time. To date, this expert committee has evaluated more than 1500 food additives, approximately 40 contaminants and naturally occurring toxicants, and residues of approximately 90 veterinary drugs.

More recently, the work of this expert committee and its counterpart in the pesticide area, the Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues, has expanded to explicitly incorporate exposure assessment as an essential component of risk assessment. Since 1963, approximately 230 pesticides have been evaluated by the Joint Meeting, many of them on several occasions.

At present, work is under development in the important area of risk assessment of microbiological hazards, jointly by FAO and WHO in cooperation with the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene. This is being done in the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment.

The adoption of principles and guidelines for the food safety assessment of foods derived from biotechnology in the last meeting of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, two weeks ago in Rome, means that a body on risk assessment of foods derived from biotechnology can be established, complementing the work of other risk assessment bodies to ensure coverage of the entire food spectrum.

The normative work of the international organizations is not only important for Codex. With the establishment of the World Trade Organization and the coming into force of its Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, often referred to as the SPS Agreement, contracting parties are required to ensure that these measures are based on risk assessments, including exposure assessments. In performing risk assessment, governments must take into account risk assessment techniques developed by the relevant international organizations and available

scientific evidence. Clearly, the exposure assessment methods developed by FAO and WHO will have a growing importance in international trade and in guiding countries in meeting their obligations under WTO.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Risk analysis is becoming a widely applied discipline, and the methods used in assessing and managing risks associated with food are under continual development. It has become crucial for countries to be well-versed in using this approach to hazards, as it is now widely used at the international level. Understanding the process allows decision-makers to take full advantage of the work carried out by international organizations and expert committees, such as the Codex Alimentarius Commission for Food Standards or joint meetings for risk assessment. Such work represents a considerable amount of resources, both financial and scientific, that might not be otherwise available to all countries. At the same time, by being aware of the process, and being able to apply it in their own settings, Member States will be able to support their views scientifically in international discussions on the development of new standards. Furthermore, using a structured approach to risk analysis also allows a country to determine both the appropriate level of protection and the associated financial resources required. Finally, this approach provides the tools to governments for efficient communication about particular risks or food control measures, and helps in the exchange of information between risk managers and consumers.

I expect that the technical information provided in this workshop, and your deliberations during the working groups, will lead to concrete action in your countries and bring us closer to achieving safe food for all.

I would like to thank our colleagues from FAO for their collaboration. Together, we are promoting food safety in our respective Member States not only through the global joint committees, but also through our joint regional workshops.

Finally, it remains only for me to wish you a successful workshop and a pleasant stay in Cairo.