



**Address by**

**DR ALA ALWAN**

**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**to the**

**CONSULTATION ON HEALTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

**IN THE**

**EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**Cairo, Egypt, 2– 4 December 2014**

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

I am delighted to welcome you to the consultation on health workforce development in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

The development of the health workforce has consistently been a vital area for WHO's collaborative work with Member States in the Region since WHO was founded more than 60 years ago. Only last week, we organized a major event about transformation of health professions education in the Region, we convened an inter-country meeting of deans of schools of medicine, representatives of ministries of higher education, ministries of health, accrediting bodies and our regional and international partners. We discussed the situation of medical education in the region and developed a road map to strengthen medical education in the region to contribute towards universal health coverage. We are planning to do the same with the other health professions education such as nursing and allied health.

This consultative meeting aims to discuss a framework for the regional health workforce strategy, which has been developed by the Regional Office informed by regional evidence and global best practices. It has earlier been reviewed by a group of international experts and during this consultation we would like to take the opportunity to have an in-depth review and seek your guidance to further improve the document. Hence I am keen that we are candid and critical in our review and at the same time constructive in order to build consensus

and help move the health workforce agenda forward in the Region. I will have no hesitation in taking this strategic framework to the Regional Committee, the highest decision making forum in the Region, once we are convinced that the document is well aligned to the upcoming global health workforce strategy and is good enough to guide the development of national health workforce strategies.

Dear colleagues,

The health workforce is a fundamental building block of any health system and the density of health workers correlates positively with improvement in population health outcomes. In recognition of this, the last few years has witnessed an increasing attention devoted to addressing health workforce issues and challenges.

A global momentum on the health workforce after the publication of the World Health Report “working together for health” in 2006 resulted in several initiatives and programmes directed to addressing constraints such as numerical shortages, inequitable distribution, retention and performance, and migration of health workers. The World Health Assembly has passed several resolutions on the health workforce including a Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel aimed at addressing migration, a daunting health workforce challenge. Success has been achieved in several fronts but challenges still persist in many places as far as health workforce development is concerned.

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, the health workforce situation echoes the global trends and challenges described. Overall density is suboptimal and the maldistribution, retention and migration challenges are major impediments to universal health coverage in several Member States. The diverse situation in the region entails different challenges to different Member States. Three broad groups of countries were identified based on population health outcomes, health system performance (including health workforce situation) and level of health expenditure. Despite some common characteristics and problems, each country group is further faced by distinct health workforce constraints and challenges.

In group 1 Member States, there is overall inadequate production of health workers leading to shortage of national staff. High reliance on expatriate health workers is the strategy adopted to resolve shortages; however, this solution brings with it the challenges of cultural competency, staff turnover and consistency of employment conditions. Group 2 countries generally produce considerable numbers of health workers but due to economic constraints,

countries in this category face deployment and retention challenges with adverse consequences on coverage and quality of health care. Group 3 Member States suffer the double burden of low production and high emigration rates of health workers leading to critical shortages with health workers rates falling below the WHO benchmark of 23 health workers per 10.000 populations.

Despite the daunting challenge, the landscape carries potential and opportunities for health workforce strengthening in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Political and high level attention to human resources for health is emerging with 14 countries (nearly two thirds of EMR Member States) declaring their health workforce commitments in the context of the 3rd Global Forum on Human Resources for Health held in Recife Brazil in 2013. Increasingly, countries in the region are embracing health workforce observatories as mechanisms for advocacy, information and coordination for HRH. There are as well best practice models in areas such as community orientated medical education, programmes for community health workers, nursing education, accreditation and self-reliance in terms of developing the national health workforce.

Dear Colleagues,

The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office has clearly identified health workforce development as a pressing priority within the context of strengthening health systems and moving towards universal health coverage. Country support in addition to ongoing efforts and initiatives on aspects such as leadership, accreditation, and health professions education reform signal the attention devoted by the Regional Office to health workforce development. The impetus to prepare the regional health workforce development strategic framework is one main milestone in this regards. There is a potential for fruitful regional collaboration in the region around health workforce issues given the diversity and complementarity among Member States in the Region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the current global discussion on the post-2015 health and development agenda, a decade of innovation on the health workforce is envisioned with the aim of revitalizing HRH agenda to meet requirements of universal health coverage and the currently shaping sustainable development goals. The World Health Assembly has passed in May 2014 a resolution on adopting Recife Declaration (issued during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Global Forum on HRH in 2013 in Recife Brazil) and giving mandate to the WHO to develop a global strategy on human resources for

health. The resulting global momentum will provide countries with opportunities and armamentarium to consolidate their efforts and take further steps towards ensuring effective health workforce for strengthening health systems, addressing new challenges and improving population health.

Ladies and Gentleman

Such a regional strategic framework document will serve as a suitable link between the global strategy and country level health workforce strategic plans. The document and the discussion around it will certainly inform the preparatory work on the Global health workforce strategy.

WHO is committed to the effort of finalizing and adopting the regional strategic framework as a guide for Member States to develop their national health workforce strategies and plans and as a reference source to inform health workforce strengthening at large. We will galvanize our technical support to Member States based on this strategic framework that you are going to discuss during this consultation and we will continue work on further developing specific technical materials on the different strategies and interventions proposed in the document.

In conclusion, I would like to assure you that WHO through its convening power, will ensure robust collaboration among Member States on strengthening the health workforce towards addressing the requirements of universal health coverage and population health improvement.

I wish you all every success in the meeting and the challenges ahead of you. I look forward to receiving the final outcome of the consultation. I am sure that your stay in Cairo will be both productive and enjoyable.