



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Address by

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to the

**COURSE ON HEALTH FINANCING FOR UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE IN
YEMEN**

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Dear Participants, Dear Colleagues,

It is with pleasure that I welcome you to this special course on Health Financing for Universal Health Coverage in Yemen, which is jointly organized with the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation (GIZ). This four-day course is designed to build national capacities in basic health financing and provide a venue to discuss health financing challenges and opportunities to enhance the performance of the health financing system in Yemen to move towards universal health coverage.

In 2013, the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean endorsed resolution EM/RC60/R.2, which called on all Member States to pursue the goal of universal health coverage, including through reform of their health financing systems to ensure that sufficient resources for health were mobilized and adequately used; and that financial protection was extended to all population groups, especially the poor and vulnerable. Since then, several regional and country-specific activities have been organized by WHO to share lessons from global and regional experiences and to identify what does and does not work in the context of the Region. The resolution also called on WHO to provide technical support to Member States, including through facilitating effective and inclusive policy dialogue. Hence, several country in-

depth assessments, consultations, policy dialogue sessions and national conferences have been held in the last two years to explore country-specific challenges and identify options for reforming the health financing system to pursue the goal of universal health coverage. The particular circumstances of Yemen delayed the implementation of similar activities, despite our several attempts.

Although we are meeting today outside Yemen, I am very pleased to see all stakeholders involved in health financing in Yemen present with us. We are committed to supporting Yemen and to reaching out to you where you are to respond to your needs. This course is part of a commitment that I made to His Excellency Dr Riyadh Yassin Abdullah during his last month's visit to the Regional Office and I am pleased that we are moving ahead with its implementation despite previous delays.

WHO collaborates with multiple development partners and international agencies to mobilize needed resources – technical and financial – to support countries in addressing the challenges they face in reforming their health financing systems. Special support was received from the European Union, the United Kingdom Department for International Development, the Rockefeller Foundation and GIZ. The present course has been organized in collaboration with GIZ and financed by a grant from GIZ to WHO, as part of our two organizations' efforts to support Yemen in reforming its health financing system. This is not the first time that WHO and GIZ have joined hands to support Yemen to inform its health financing strategy – already in 2005, WHO and GIZ (GTZ at the time) jointly conducted a feasibility study, along with the International Labour Organization, to assess the capacity of various health financing modalities to pursue the goal of universal health coverage in Yemen.

The challenges that Yemen faces to reform its health financing system are big – but the opportunities available to address them are bigger. The low public investment in health – with less than 4% of total government expenditure spent on health in 2012; and the high share of out-of-pocket payments – exceeding 70% of total health spending in recent years, both call for mobilizing more money for health and for establishing equitable and sustainable prepayment arrangements. In 2011, Yemen enacted a Social Health Insurance Law and subsequently established a Social Health Insurance Authority and a Social Health Insurance Fund. These, however, remain not fully functional. More is needed to ensure that the enacted Law operates

within an overall health financing strategy and that the Social Health Insurance Authority is equipped with the necessary human and financial resources to fulfil the functions entrusted to it.

In May 2013, a joint mission coordinated by P4H – “Providing for Health” – was organized to advise the Government of Yemen on options to reform its health financing system to move towards universal health coverage. The mission grouped WHO, GIZ and the European Union, in addition to the World Bank and USAID. The mission developed a roadmap to reform the health financing system in Yemen, with specified responsibilities for each of the partner agencies. Unfortunately, the unstable political situation in the country did not allow for a smooth implementation of the roadmap and called for innovative approaches to provide the needed support. Organizing this course in the presence of the main partners who took part in the P4H mission is one way to go beyond the persistent challenges in Yemen.

Building national capacities and articulating country-specific policy options are two of the six core functions of WHO repeatedly articulated in its General Programme of Work. This course aims at building national capacities in the area of health care financing and at reviewing where Yemen is in regard to the performance of its health financing system. Different options will be deliberated and the previously developed roadmap will be revised and adapted considering recent developments in the country. All of this comes at an opportune time as Yemen embarks on developing a new National Health Strategy (2016–2020). It is at such moments when strategic directions and options need to be identified and corresponding support needs to be formulated.

It is important to note that in informing countries’ strategies to move towards universal health coverage, paying attention to the dimensions of service coverage is paramount. Accordingly, a special session on Day 3 of the programme is devoted to service provision, with focus on quality of care as a big challenge for enhancing universal health coverage in Yemen.

Moving towards universal health coverage is a political commitment and a call that gathers all national and international advocates around the goal of the right to health. The political challenges in Yemen should not distract us from working towards developing the needed vision and roadmap for universal health coverage and embarking on its implementation.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank again GIZ for their general support to this course, as well as to the support that it extends to enhancing the performance of the health systems in other countries in our Region. I invite you to benefit from the wealth of experience of our facilitators and to actively participate in the various working groups and panel discussions to

further build your capacities and contribute to building the future of health financing in your country.

I wish you a pleasant stay in Cairo and hope to meet you again soon in Yemen.

Thank you.