



Address by

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to the

**REGIONAL CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON EMERGING AND DANGEROUS  
PATHOGENS LABORATORY NETWORK**

**Cairo, Egypt, 22–23 August 2017**

Dear Colleagues, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome you all to this regional consultative meeting on the WHO Emerging and Dangerous Pathogens Laboratory Network. I wish to express my deep appreciation and sincere thanks to all of you for accepting our invitation and being present here today. I am also delighted to see that officials from ministries of health and agriculture, many of our regional centres of expertise, WHO collaborating centres and partner agencies are attending this meeting today with us. Our colleagues from WHO headquarters have also joined us. Indeed, your presence today signifies the importance of this meeting for protecting the health of the population of our Region from the threats of emerging and dangerous pathogens that are so common in the Region.

Dear Colleagues,

The high incidence of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases poses a perennial threat to our regional health security. At least 12 of the 22 countries in our Region have experienced one or more emerging infectious disease outbreaks over the last decade, with significant impact on trade and economy. The ongoing humanitarian emergencies in our Region result in fragile health systems and increased population movement and displacement – they also contribute to the rapid spread of disease once a new pathogen emerges. In addition, increased human–animal interaction is also leading to the emergence of zoonotic pathogens that have epidemic and pandemic potential.

Other major challenges to prevention and control efforts for emerging diseases include knowledge gaps on the risk factors for transmission of emerging infections; weak and inconsistent surveillance systems; limited laboratory diagnostic capacity; and insufficient investment in disease surveillance and response activities. As pathogens can spread quickly in today's interconnected world, presenting a threat to all countries, the need to prevent, detect and respond to these infectious disease threats remains a national, regional and international

priority. With this in mind, I presented a road map for WHO's work in the Eastern Mediterranean Region for 2017 to 2021 to Member States during the last World Health Assembly in May of this year, emphasizing that prevention, containment and response efforts for emerging and re-emerging diseases remain top priorities.

Dear Colleagues,

Early confirmation of the diseases that pose a health threat require laboratories which operate within appropriate biosafety levels and which have the capacity to deliver accurate diagnoses of emerging viral and bacterial pathogens. Early confirmation also requires having a referral network of laboratories to provide a service that covers all the countries in the Region. In order to ensure that our laboratories have these capacities and strengths, the WHO Regional Office is setting up a network of high security laboratories. The purpose of this network is to enhance both the readiness and response of countries for timely laboratory detection and management of outbreaks of novel, emerging and dangerous pathogens, and to facilitate the transfer of safe and appropriate diagnostic technologies, practices and training to laboratories in our Region. We expect that through these efforts, the technical capacities of our public health laboratories for detection and reporting of emerging and dangerous pathogens will be enhanced, and some of these laboratories will also be able to serve as regional reference laboratories.

I am also happy to see that some veterinary officials from the ministries of agriculture are attending this meeting. Their presence here signifies the importance of having greater collaboration, exchange of information and expertise, and sharing of diagnostic resources between the public health and animal health laboratories under the "One Health" approach. This collaboration will be key to preventing zoonotic infections and also to the early detection of any emerging zoonotic pathogen at the animal-human interface. Consequently, the proposed emerging and dangerous pathogens laboratory network in the Eastern Mediterranean Region will comprise high-security human and veterinary diagnostic laboratories.

Distinguished participants,

We need coordinated global action to safeguard and protect our public health. We need an inclusive approach that taps into and harnesses expertise from all sectors, including the animal health sector, to prevent and contain infectious disease threats. I am sure this regional consultative meeting will take into consideration the necessity of planning and implementing these actions collectively.

I personally wish to thank the Defence Threat Reduction Agency of the Department of Defence in the United States of America for supporting the work of the Emerging and Dangerous Pathogens Laboratory Network in our Region, including sponsoring this meeting.

I wish you all a very successful meeting and a pleasant stay in Cairo.