



Address by

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WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION
to the
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Mr Ahmed Aboul Gheit, General Secretary, League of Arab States
Dr Ahmed Emad El Din Rady, Minister of Health and Population, Egypt
Dr Tawfik Khoja, General Secretary, Arab Hospitals Federation
Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to be you today during this prestigious event to issue the Cairo Declaration for Arab Women's Health 2017 (Your Health is our Priority), which reflects the position of Arab women as a key foundation for development in countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region. We would like also to commend the announcement by His Excellency Abdelfatah El Sisi, President of Egypt, that 2017 will be the Year of the Egyptian Woman; an initiative that underlines the Arab leadership's belief in the pivotal role women are playing and establishes Arab women's health as a foundation for the comprehensive development of young generations of the greater Arab world.

I deeply appreciate the invitation to take part with this galaxy of distinguished guests in this important event, especially given that the theme focuses on setting priorities for the challenges of women's health. This gathering, organized by the Arab Hospitals Federation and the League of Arab States illustrates a good partnership initiative in bringing together Ministers of Health, important experts, key stakeholders and private sector partners around one of the most important health topics of our time: women's health and the 2030 Agenda for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I am humbled to be among an elite group of policy-makers and experts in this area, which is of vital importance for our Region and one of the key priorities for WHO's work with Member States.

We in WHO highly value our close collaboration with the League of Arab States, and in fact consider ourselves part of this esteemed establishment. With this, I would like to begin my address by reiterating our commitment to fully support the League of Arab States with the necessary technical support and in line with our joint agendas and plan of work.

The Region is currently facing immense challenges, which consequently affect different areas of work including the health sector. During my acceptance address to the WHO Executive Board last month, I committed to act immediately and mobilize all efforts to overcome the challenges that our Region faces in the area of health development. We need to be close to our Member States and their needs, to ensure that we are better positioned to introduce the tangible changes that are needed the most.

Over my term as Regional Director, and with the close support of Ministries of Health and partners like the Arab League, WHO will focus on the following five health priorities in the Region: 1) tackling emergencies; 2) strengthening health systems; 3) controlling communicable and noncommunicable diseases; 4) reducing mortality of mothers and children; and 5) addressing inequities through focusing on the social determinants of health.

Now, let me turn to the specific context of this meeting. I would like to touch upon the main challenges in the area of maternal health in our Region. Although significant progress was made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, with a 54% decrease in the regional maternal mortality ratio, from 362 to 166 per 100 000 live births between 1990 and 2015, only three countries achieved MDG5 and overall maternal mortality reduction did not reach the set goal of 75% by 2015. We must build on the successes and on the lessons learnt in targeting the major causes of maternal morbidity and mortality in Member States.

To respond to this situation, the Dubai Declaration was endorsed by you, the Ministers of Health during a high-level meeting in Dubai in 2013. Simultaneously, the regional initiative on Saving the Lives of Mothers and Children was launched and has significantly contributed to accelerating the reduction of maternal mortality in high-burden Member States.

As we are entering the era of the Sustainable Development Goals, and in line with the United Nations global strategy on women's, children's and adolescents' health: 2016–2030, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, jointly with concerned partners, is adopting an integrated multisectoral approach to maternal and child health through universal health coverage and better quality of care through family practice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To conclude, I would like to stress the importance of joint work among all national partners, international organizations, civil society organizations and other key players, in order to achieve maternal and child health related Goals by 2030.

Finally, reproductive and maternal health must remain a priority for all Member States, especially with Arab women taking top positions in different fields and unique women leaders excelling in health, educational, social and economic arenas.

We are fully positive that Arab women's progress in promoting comprehensive development will exceed our expectations and will overcome the challenges to a brighter future. I wish you success and prosperity.

Thank you.