



Message from

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on the occasion of
WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY

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Every year we commemorate World TB Day on 24 March to raise public awareness of the devastating health, social and economic consequences of tuberculosis (TB) and to step up efforts to end the global TB epidemic. The date marks the day in 1882 when Dr Robert Koch announced that he had discovered the bacterium that causes TB, which opened the way towards diagnosing and curing this disease.

Despite significant progress over the last few decades, TB continues to be ranked, along with HIV, as the leading cause of death and top infectious killer worldwide, claiming over 4500 lives a day. The emergence of multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) poses a major threat to health security and could risk gains made in the fight against TB. World TB Day provides an opportunity to shine the spotlight on the disease and mobilize political and social commitment to accelerate progress to end TB.

In 2016, the estimated number of TB cases was 10.4 million globally with the number of estimated cases at 766 000 in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Case notification in 2016 represented only 67% of the estimated cases. However, the treatment success rate remains stable at 91%. TB mortality has decreased significantly from 38 per 100 000 population in 2000 to 12 per 100 000 in 2016 with a total number of about 82 000 deaths. Diagnosis and treatment of resistant cases represent about 22% of the estimated cases.

This situation is a stark reminder that tuberculosis continues to retain its status as a grave public health threat globally and in our Region and that we need to do much more to achieve the End TB Strategy and targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, we have made progress. The Region is one of four WHO regions that met the target to halve the tuberculosis mortality rate by 2015 compared with 1990 estimates. National control programmes, health workers, donors, activists and communities have persistently struggled to provide tuberculosis care services amid the chaos and uncertainty posed by conflicts and disasters in countries of the Region in recent years.

The progress against all odds in the Region's fight against tuberculosis is significant. However, there are also major obstacles still to overcome. Despite the availability of rapid diagnosis and low cost treatment, one third of the estimated TB cases in 2016 in our Region were missed or not reported. This is a major challenge for ending the tuberculosis epidemic, as it sustains tuberculosis transmission and constitutes a major risk for individual patients.

The theme of World TB Day 2018 – “Wanted: Leaders for a TB-free world” – focuses on building commitment to end TB, not only at the political level with Heads of State and ministers of health, but at all levels from mayors, governors, parliamentarians and community leaders, to people affected with TB, civil society advocates, health workers, doctors or nurses, nongovernmental organizations and other partners. All can be leaders of efforts to end TB in their own work or terrain.

This is a critical theme, given the political importance of the upcoming United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on TB in September this year, which will bring together Heads of State in New York. This meeting follows on from a very successful Global Ministerial Conference on Ending TB in Moscow in November, 2017 which resulted in high-level commitment from ministers and other leaders from 120 countries to accelerate progress to end TB.

We are confident that with the high level commitment of Heads of State, ministers of health and the intensified support of the Regional Office on the ground, a large number of countries will improve their case detection rates to reach the regional targets set for 2020 as a step forward to achieve the End TB Strategy and the SDGs. We look forward for the final declaration and the new commitments from the high-level meeting on TB in September 2018.

Thank you.