



*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

**Address by**

**Dr Ala Alwan**

**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**to the**

**NATIONAL CONSULTATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
NONCOMMUNICABLE DISEASE PREVENTION AND CONTROL PROGRAMMES  
IN LEBANON**

**Beirut, Lebanon 23 March 2012**

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very pleased to be with you today on this very important occasion which addresses noncommunicable disease programmes in Lebanon.

We are all aware that noncommunicable diseases are currently the main cause of mortality and morbidity, both globally and in our Region. The magnitude and growth of noncommunicable diseases are one of the key health challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, threatening socioeconomic development, as well as the life and health of millions of people.

Noncommunicable diseases are the cause of 60% of all deaths in the world. Of these, 80%, or 38 million deaths, are among people from low-income and middle-income countries. Nine million people die prematurely (before 60 years of age) from noncommunicable diseases every year, accounting for 47% of total mortality from noncommunicable diseases in low-income and lower middle-income countries.

This burden is predicted to worsen in the coming years. WHO projects an increase in global deaths of a further 17% in this decade, meaning that 41 million people a year will die of a

chronic disease. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, noncommunicable diseases account for over 50% of annual deaths in the Region. In some countries, over 60% of these are premature deaths.

Noncommunicable diseases largely result from four behavioural risk factors. These are tobacco use, unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity and harmful use of alcohol. These risk factors can be prevented and their fatal consequences can be avoided.

Equally important, noncommunicable diseases and their risk factors lead to increased burden on households. This can include impoverishment from long-term treatment and care costs. Noncommunicable diseases thus reduce families to poverty, which may have a direct impact on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. At the economic level, it is estimated that the global cumulative lost output due to noncommunicable diseases will be US\$ 47 trillion over the period 2011–2025, including US\$ 7 trillion in developing countries alone.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the efforts of Member States and WHO to curb the escalating epidemic, the launch of an effective response for prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases in the Region is constrained by many challenges. These include weak political commitment, political instability, weak health systems and insufficient intersectoral collaboration.

There is clearly a need for urgent action, particularly now when we have strong evidence that premature deaths and disability from noncommunicable diseases can be cut considerably by reducing the main associated risk factors, focusing on evidence-based, cost-effective interventions.

The global noncommunicable diseases strategy developed in 2000 and subsequent plan of action developed in 2008 are considered to be the road map for effective planning and implementation of noncommunicable disease programmes by all Member States. The action plan translated the broad directions recommended by the global strategy into six objectives, and outlined possible interventions to be implemented at the regional and country levels with three sets of action under each objective directed to Member States, WHO and international partners.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Encouraging progress has been made recently. In September 2011, the UN General Assembly issued the Political Declaration on prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases. This was only the second time in the history of the United Nations that the General Assembly met at Heads of States and governments level and agreed on an emerging health issue with a major socioeconomic impact. Through the declaration, heads of state and governments committed to:

- Establish or strengthen, by 2013, national multisectoral policies and plans for noncommunicable diseases, taking into account the global strategy for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases (endorsed by the World Health Assembly in 2000).
- Integrate policies and programmes into the health planning processes and the national development agenda of each country.
- Develop national targets and indicators based on guidance provided by WHO and give greater priority to surveillance.
- Accelerate the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, and the Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol.
- Strengthen health systems that support primary care, prioritize early detection and treatment, and improve access to affordable essential medicines for noncommunicable diseases.

Ladies and Gentlemen

To translate the UN General Assembly political declaration into a national action plan, I am sure this meeting will be a crucial step forward for noncommunicable diseases programmes in Lebanon. We need to be in agreement on the strategic directions for these programmes, considering that our objectives are best achieved when intersectoral collaboration and partnership are in place. It is critical to focus on the most cost-effective approaches (best buys), to highlight the importance of making effective use of the available primary health care services, and to strengthen prevention.

I am confident that during this meeting the exchange of views and ideas will provide valuable information for the development of effective noncommunicable diseases programmes in Lebanon.

I wish you all a successful consultation and fruitful outcomes.

Thank you for your attention