



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

**Address by**

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**on the occasion of the**

**NATIONAL CELEBRATION OF WORLD MALARIA DAY**

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Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you today to mark World Malaria Day here in Islamabad. Let me take this opportunity to thank His Excellency Mr Anisul Hasnain Musvi, Minister of Inter-Provincial Coordination, Pakistan, for his commitment to the health of the people of Pakistan. Supporting the Government of Pakistan and its partners to improve the health and well-being of the Pakistani people is a high priority for WHO. Let me also acknowledge with great appreciation the efforts being made by the malaria control programme staff in all provinces and areas of Pakistan. I am very happy that we have all gathered here today to highlight the significance of a major but often forgotten public health problem, that of malaria.

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are aware, malaria is still a global problem. According to the most recent malaria report of 2012, there were an estimated 219 million cases of malaria (range 154–289 million) and 660 000 deaths (range 490 000–836 600) from malaria in 2010. The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region experiences around 10.4 million cases of malaria each year and around 15 000 deaths due to malaria. Unfortunately, about half of the population of the Region still live in areas at risk of malaria. Of the reported cases in 2010, around 98% of confirmed cases were reported from five countries of the Region, including Pakistan.

In 1998, the Region joined the global Roll Back Malaria initiative at its launch. Since then, the malaria programme has become a priority for WHO, as well as for all the Member States where malaria occurs. The strategy to fight malaria in the Region has been developed with the objective of halving the malaria burden in malaria endemic countries by 2010, with further reduction by 2015 to 75%, compared to the year 2000. This is in line with the global objectives.

Let me share with you the global and regional perspective of the efforts being carried out to control and eliminate this preventable and treatable disease. We have come a long way in the fight against malaria. Between 2000 and 2010, malaria mortality fell by 26% worldwide and more than 1.1 million deaths were successfully averted. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, by the end of 2012, 14 countries were free of malaria, two were on track to eliminate the disease and more than 38 million people had access to the protection of long-lasting insecticide treated nets.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are aware, malaria is being effectively controlled in most areas in Pakistan. However, the situation and quality of malaria control efforts are not the same in all provinces. The burden is notably higher, and the control programme less strong, in some areas, especially in Baluchistan, Khyber Pukhtunkhawa and Sind Provinces. There are signs of deterioration in the situation in some districts in Punjab following the massive floods in 2010. It is also understood that the programme is facing great challenges with regard to importation of malaria from Afghanistan, and resistance of parasites to drugs and of vectors to insecticides. Malaria control is always a complex matter. Insecurity in some areas of the country, devolution of the Federal Ministry of Health and coordination between the federal and provincial malaria control programmes are important contributing factors to the complexity of this problem in Pakistan.

I appreciate the fact that the Government of Pakistan and partners have been striving hard against malaria since the launch of the Roll Back Malaria initiative in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and that several milestones have been achieved in this fight. It is satisfying to know that the necessary plans, guidelines and resources are available in the country. However, the scope of the malaria problem leaves no room for complacency. There are substantial challenges ahead if we are to achieve malaria control and move towards elimination of this disease in Pakistan.

There is an urgent need to address the limited and unequal access to diagnosis, treatment services and effective preventive tools. The system of case detection and information needs substantial review in order to improve passive case detection and monitoring of malaria morbidity and mortality. Domestic financing for malaria is negligible and needs to be enhanced. There is also a need to establish a system for continuous monitoring and prevention of drug resistance and for insecticide resistance management.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is a very critical time in history because the time left to achieve the Millennium Development Goals is only three years from now. We are all accountable before the global community for what we have achieved and what we could not achieve in addressing problems like malaria, which contributes to all three health-related Millennium Development Goals. Realizing this, we are joining you all on this World Malaria Day to discuss jointly how to move forward. Today's event in Islamabad is not just an event of significance for Pakistan, but for the whole Region, because of the scale of the malaria problem in this country.

We need to do better in our efforts against malaria. We need to focus our efforts on areas of greatest need, and protect every person living in a malaria risk-area with effective prevention tools. The programme should develop and implement strategies to ensure that every suspected case of malaria is tested, every confirmed case is treated and every case is tracked through a good surveillance system, pursuing the three pillars of the WHO T3 approach. Needless to say, this is all the more significant in the post-devolution context with the active support being essential of all national, provincial and district authorities.

Devolution has brought challenges but there are also opportunities. Now with the new roles and responsibilities in health, the provincial departments of health need concerted efforts to secure political commitment, to raise adequate domestic resources and to draw attention to malaria. The national authorities need to continue and strengthen their role in inter-provincial coordination, nationwide effective surveillance and attracting international financing.

I assure you WHO is, and will remain, a committed partner in each and every aspect that I have mentioned. Our teams at regional, national and provincial levels are available for guidance and support. No one can fight this complex disease alone. We are all in it together and together we can win this battle. Today, on the occasion of World Malaria Day, let us

seize the opportunity, focus our efforts, and work together to control and finally eliminate malaria from Pakistan. It is possible. It is feasible. Let us prove it.