



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

**Message from**

**DR ALA ALWAN**

**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**on the occasion of**

**WORLD MALARIA DAY**

**25 April 2013**

Today we are marking World Malaria Day. A day to remember and reflect on what we are doing to stop the suffering caused by the world's leading infectious killer disease. In 2007, when the World Health Assembly decided to mark 25 April as World Malaria Day, the spirit and motivation behind the decision was to see the end of this preventable and treatable disease. Let us remind ourselves how true we have been to this intention.

We have come a long way. Statistics show progress has been made in our fight against malaria. Between 2000 and 2010, malaria mortality fell by 26% globally. We were successful in averting more than 1.1 million deaths. International funding for malaria prevention and control has steadily increased and reached US\$1.84 billion in 2012.

In 2010 there were an estimated 219 million cases of malaria (range 154–289 million) and 660 000 deaths (range 490 000–836 000). The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region experiences around 10.4 million cases of malaria and around 15 000 deaths due to malaria every year. Half of the population of the Region still live in areas at risk of malaria transmission. About 98% of the confirmed malaria cases in 2010 were reported from 5 countries: Afghanistan, Pakistan, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen.

The past decade has seen several successes against malaria in Region. Two countries were certified as malaria-free, two interrupted local transmission and two are close to eliminating the disease. Millions of people in malaria-risk areas now have access to protection by long-lasting insecticide treated nets or indoor residual spraying. Effective antimalarial medicines are increasingly available in most health facilities together with diagnostic tools. This is good progress but not enough to win the battle.

There are numerous challenges in the fight against malaria in endemic countries. However, none is impossible to overcome. Funding the political commitment to malaria control is one of these challenges. In addition, security issues and the impact of natural disasters affect several countries. Needless to say, both situations greatly compromise the efforts of health staff to provide prevention, diagnosis and treatment services. Indeed, the challenges facing malaria-endemic countries are threatening the progress made in malaria-free countries. Recent years have seen considerable increase in importations of malaria cases from these countries through migrants, tourists and cross-border movement of populations. Parasite and vector resistance are additional threats that may jeopardize achievements.

We have only three years left to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). By 2015, we will be reporting on our commitment to the world. This fight against malaria is critical for all health-related Millennium Development Goals. If we don't act today, and act more effectively than yesterday, the cost will be millions of human lives.

So how can we best fight malaria and defeat it?

I believe the answer lies in our commitment to, and action on, effective use of the T3 approach that WHO is promoting for malaria prevention and control. T3 means: test every suspected case of malaria; treat every confirmed case; and track every case through good surveillance. We have had success in recent years with new diagnostic tools and more effective antimalarial medicines. We need to ensure that people have access to prevention measures, to new diagnosis options and to quality assured medicine. And we can then track changes.

Today, as the world marks World Malaria Day with the slogan "Invest in the future. Defeat malaria", we need to renew our commitment to saving lives by fighting malaria in better ways. Each one of us has a contribution to make. As leaders, we should make it our priority that malaria programmes are supported and adequately funded. As managers we need to ensure that available funds are well spent on malaria care services and effective surveillance mechanisms are in place. As health workers we should make malaria prevention and control a personal commitment and not just an employment responsibility. As a community we should work together to help health workers in their responsibilities. No one can do this successfully alone. We all are in it together and together we can win against malaria. Today on the occasion of World Malaria Day, let us seize the opportunity, focus our efforts, and work together to defeat malaria. It is possible. Let us prove it.