



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

**Address by**

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**to the**

**INTERCOUNTRY MEETING ON MIDDLE EAST RESPIRATORY  
SYNDROME CORONAVIRUS (MERS-CoV) OUTBREAK  
IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**EMRO, Cairo, Egypt, 20-22 June 2013**

Dear Colleagues, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome you all to this intercountry meeting. I wish to express my deep appreciation and sincere thanks to all of you for accepting our invitation and being present here today, despite the very short notice. I am also delighted to see that health officials from the countries in Europe that have recently been affected by this outbreak have also responded positively to our invitation and are with us today. Our colleagues from the WHO Regional Office for Europe, WHO headquarters, WHO Collaborating Centres and our partner agencies have also joined us. Indeed, your presence today signifies the importance of this meeting for global health. It is almost a year since this novel coronavirus emerged and a reality check is much needed on where we stand in addressing the threat this virus poses to public health. We also need to see what we should be doing collectively to protect people from this emerging risk.

Dear Colleagues,

Last January, here in this room, we organized a technical consultative meeting on this novel coronavirus. The meeting brought together national experts who were involved in investigations of cases that had occurred in their countries, scientists who were involved with

the study of the origin of the virus, and experts who had participated in the global public health response to SARS and avian influenza. The proceedings of that meeting were published in a special supplement of the Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal last month, which has drawn wider attention to the issue from the scientific communities. We use science and knowledge to better understand how people's health can be protected. Just as science is an evolving process, so is our understanding of the behaviour and transmission risk of this virus also gradually unfolding. We may not have yet the full picture about the origin and exposure risk of this virus, but the recent events in a health care facility in Saudi Arabia reminded us that the virus can spread quickly and widely whenever our vigilance is lowered. In this context, I would like to highlight the effective measures taken by Saudi Arabia to contain infection. WHO highly appreciates these efforts and the constructive cooperation between Saudi Arabia and WHO experts in this area.

We now need to translate the knowledge we have accumulated so far on the behaviour of this virus wisely and decisively into concrete action points that you can implement. Saving lives from this virus should be our prime objective if we want to defeat the threat this emerging infection poses to global health.

Currently, we are at a critical juncture in public health. Our region has borne the brunt of several emerging infectious diseases and is now a focus for global health following the discovery of this novel coronavirus. A lesson learned is that such emerging infections are unexpected and unpredictable events. Another is that any disease outbreak anywhere today could be a problem for the world tomorrow. These novel diseases will continue to confront and challenge the resilience and responsiveness of national health authorities. Likewise, the ability of regional and global communities to cooperate in order to control these diseases that cross national boundaries will be a test for global health security.

What is important now is to continue to assess the risk of the global threat associated with the emergence of this novel virus. Close regional and inter-regional collaboration between the countries where cases have occurred and also between WHO and other international health bodies who are also responsible for global health is vital. While the global efforts should continue to fill the current gaps in knowledge associated with this virus, much greater regional and inter-regional cooperation is needed to protect the health of our people.

Based on the current situation and available information, we encourage all of Member States to enhance their surveillance for severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) and to carefully review any unusual patterns of transmission. The recent evidence from our Region has also shown that we need to strongly remind healthcare workers to maintain strict infection control measures in all health facilities, while providing care for any suspected nCoV case.

This intercountry meeting will brief our Member States on the current situation in our Region related to the emergence of this virus and discuss the current level of response and control measures being undertaken in the affected countries and I hope we will agree on an action plan that can collectively improve and strengthen our public health preparedness measures.

Dear Colleagues,

We need a coordinated global action plan to safeguard and protect our public health. We need an inclusive approach that taps and harnesses expertise from all around the globe. I therefore take this opportunity to remind us all, once again, of the value and importance of the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) for rapid and meaningful information-sharing between WHO and State Parties. We have the means today to mount an international global response if an event threatens to become internationally overwhelming.

I am sure that this meeting will take into consideration the necessity to plan and implement these actions collectively. We need to be better prepared for this event than ever and we need to be better armed to bring an end to this threat.

I wish you all a very successful meeting and a pleasant stay in Cairo.