



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

MESSAGE FROM

DR MAHMOUD FIKRI

REGIONAL DIRECTOR

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION
ON THE OCCASION OF IMMUNIZATION WEEK
IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION 2017**

24–30 April 2017 – Immunization Week – celebrated in the last week of April every year – highlights the importance of immunization not only in protecting the health of children but people of all ages. The theme of this year’s Immunization Week in the Region is “Vaccines Work”. Vaccines do work and their use dramatically improves health indicators in all countries.

The Global Vaccine Action Plan, endorsed by WHO’s 194 Member States during the World Health Assembly in May 2012, provides a framework to prevent millions of deaths by 2020 through providing more equitable access to existing vaccines for people in all communities.

An increasing number of safe and effective vaccines are becoming available to prevent the mortality and morbidity associated with vaccine-preventable diseases.

Thanks to the efforts of governments, partners and the international community, vaccines are being made available to more people at affordable prices. It is unfortunate that progress in WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean Region has been hindered as a result of unrest and insecurity in almost one third of countries in the Region. Nevertheless, vaccines are still reaching vulnerable populations through the efforts of those, such as nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations, working to prevent disease and mortality.

Despite all efforts, 3.8 million children under one year of age in the Region, or almost 1 in 5 children, are still not receiving their third dose of diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus (DPT)-containing vaccines in 2015, according to WHO/UNICEF estimates. We need to move rapidly to bridge the gaps in immunization coverage and use the available vaccines for the

benefit of all. I am urging Member States to invest in immunization programmes, in line with the Global Vaccine Action Plan, as one dollar spent on immunization brings more than 16 times the return in economic benefit, proving once again that immunization programmes are one of the best cost-effective public health interventions. Immunization is a path towards sustainable development and global health security.

I would also like to take this opportunity to urge communities to demand immunization as their right, and partners to support immunization programmes while this external support is still required by governments.

Let us join hands this week to spread the message and achieve the goals of the Global Vaccine Action Plan – ensuring strong country commitment for immunization as a priority, demanding immunization as a right and responsibility, equitably extending the benefits of immunization to all people, building health systems, ensuring sustainable funding and taking this agenda forward through research and further development.

Thank you
