



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Address by

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to the

**MEETING OF DIRECTORS OF THE HEALTH SECURITY CLUSTER OF
THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION**

Cairo, Egypt, 23-24 April 2014

Dear Colleagues,

I am very pleased to see you all this morning here at the WHO Regional Office for Eastern Mediterranean. I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr Keiji Fukuda, Assistant Director General for Health Security, for allowing us to host this first meeting of the Directors of the Health Security Cluster of WHO in Cairo.

While we are holding this meeting, a number of WHO regions are currently facing substantial risks from infectious disease epidemics posing a grave threat to our global health security. The outbreaks of Middle East respiratory syndrome in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, avian influenza A (H7N9) in the Western Pacific Region and the Ebola outbreak in the Africa Region are some of the examples that we are currently facing and responding collectively as “one WHO”. As the world continues to grow more interconnected, the accelerated pace of globalization is amplifying the risk of international spread of these diseases which remain a global concern to us. On top of these infectious disease risks, we are also facing catastrophic threats from antimicrobial resistance, as existing pathogens are becoming resistant to available antibiotics and there is a “discovery void”, with no new antibiotics coming to market. In the face of all these emerging threats, the need for coordination of efforts to avoid global crises is increasingly urgent.

While the primary responsibility of our Member States is to protect the health and safety of their people, our responsibilities, as enshrined in the International Health Regulations (2005), are to protect the countries from global health security threats and to build their capacities to prevent, timely detect and effectively respond to any local health threats that has the potential to become global.

Dear Colleagues

I am sure that over the next two days you will discuss in detail how we should work collectively in responding to all these emerging health threats as well as to building and maintaining the capacities of countries as required under the IHR (2005). From the organizational perspective, we need to ensure that we have the right technical and scientific expertise to provide global leadership in developing evidence, recommendations and public health measures. We must also have the right means to work with our Member States in a way that promotes their self-sufficiency in the areas of preventing and controlling emerging health threats.

I personally have great expectations from this meeting, as the Region faces repeated threats from epidemics which are potentially devastating to the sustained development and economies of many of our Member States. We need to find a way to improve WHO's inter-regional collaboration and coordination in the areas of work of health security and IHR, as many countries in one region may share common borders, health threats and public health risks with countries in another region. Improved cross-border collaboration in the areas of surveillance and response between neighbouring WHO regions will go a long way in preventing these common health threats. We also need to look at ways for other WHO regions to benefit from the technical and scientific expertise that may be available in one particular WHO region owing to its experience in managing a particular health and disease threat (for example expertise in managing Nipah virus in the South-East Asia Region, MERS-CoV in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and avian influenza H7N9 in the Western Pacific Region). This would ensure consistency in results and synergy of efforts across all WHO regions.

With these expectations, I wish you all a very successful meeting and a pleasant stay in Cairo.