



**Give blood  
for those who give life**



Message from  
Dr Ala Alwan  
Regional Director  
WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region  
on the occasion of

## **World Blood Donor Day 2014**

Every year on 14 June, countries around the world celebrate World Blood Donor Day to honour and thank those people who donate their blood on a voluntary, unpaid basis to give the most precious gift of all – the gift of life. The Day provides a special opportunity to create public awareness and build a culture of voluntary blood donation. This annual event highlights the unique life-saving role that voluntary, non-remunerated blood donors play for their communities.

*“Safe blood for saving mothers”* is the theme of this year’s World Blood Donor Day. The campaign aims to improve access to safe blood to manage pregnancy-related complications as part of a comprehensive approach to maternal care.

Every day, about 800 women die from pregnancy or childbirth-related complications worldwide. Almost all of these deaths occur in developing countries. Severe bleeding during delivery and after childbirth is a major cause of mortality, morbidity and long-term disability. Blood transfusion is recognized as a key life-saving intervention for the management of pregnancy- and childbirth-related complications.

Blood collected from voluntary unpaid donors is the cornerstone of a safe and sufficient blood supply. Donations from regular, voluntary unpaid donors are considered the safest source of blood, as the prevalence of bloodborne infections is lowest among this group. WHO’s goal is for all countries to obtain all their blood supplies from 100% voluntary unpaid blood donations by 2020.

The most common cause of preventable maternal deaths in the Region is severe bleeding. Many of these deaths could be prevented through access to safe blood and blood products. In several countries, the greatest need for donated blood is for the management of severe anaemia and pregnancy-related complications. As well, in the countries experiencing complex humanitarian emergencies, the safety and availability of blood supply are at risk among affected populations.

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, low- and middle-income countries suffer from an acute shortage of safe blood. Most of these countries collect less than half of the blood needed, with an average donation rate of 10 donations per 1000 population. Voluntary non-remunerated blood donors comprise on average 50% of regional donors, ranging between 2% and 100% in some countries. Due to the inadequate supply of blood from voluntary unpaid donors, most countries depend on the families of patients for replacing the blood units required for transfusion.

The primary challenge to improving blood safety and availability in the Region is the lack of national policies, strategies and action plans that reflect a comprehensive approach to addressing issues of safety, quality, sufficiency, availability and timely accessibility of blood and blood products.

WHO's strategy for blood safety and availability addresses five key areas: establishment of a well-organized, nationally-coordinated blood transfusion service; collection of blood from voluntary unpaid blood donors from low-risk populations; quality-assured testing for transfusion-transmittable infections, blood grouping and compatibility testing; safe and appropriate use of blood; and quality systems covering the entire transfusion process.

*“Give blood for those who give life”* is the slogan of this year's World Blood Donor Day. It is a plea to ministries of health, national blood services, maternal health programmes and civil society to take concrete steps towards improving health service delivery and access to safe blood and blood products from volunteer unpaid donors for women giving birth. In other words: saving the lives of those who give life.

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Regional Director



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