



Address by

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to the

TECHNICAL CONSULTATION ON ALL HAZARD EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

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Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

I am pleased to welcome you to this WHO technical consultation on all hazard emergency preparedness in the Region. I wish to express my thanks to all of you for being present here despite your busy schedules. Indeed, your presence reflects the importance of this meeting, which aims to recommend the most appropriate public health preparedness measures to be taken to prepare national health systems to mount a timely and efficient response to any emergency. We have also invited colleagues from other United Nations agencies and WHO colleagues from other regions to share their experiences and good practices in order to maximize WHO's efforts to scale up regional preparedness.

Over the past few years, health systems in the Region have been tested by a number of emergencies. In some cases the health system withstood the test, in others it was challenged, but we learned lessons from each experience and it is now time to apply what we have learned to future actions to protect the region. It is not only emergencies that are killing people but the lack of optimum preparedness.

Dear colleagues

Prevailing crises and potential disasters in the Eastern Mediterranean Region highlight the need for improving national capacity for emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. In 2014, resolution EM/RC61/R.1 urged Member States to: "Strengthen the capacity of health systems to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies and crises following a whole-health and multisectoral approach, with special emphasis on reinforcing technical capacity in preparedness."

Dear colleagues

Responding to emergencies has become increasingly difficult due to inadequate preparedness efforts and lack of available resources. Globally, resources have become limited while the

challenges have increased many folds. Losses from emergencies are diverting valuable resources from national development funds so supporting countries to prepare optimally for emergencies is a primary responsibility for all of us – partners, donors and the international community. Strengthening emergency preparedness is now a ‘must’ in the region; it is no longer just an option. It is also a requirement of the International Health Regulations (IHR) to enhance national health security. The recent Ebola crisis further demonstrated the need to strengthen health system preparedness to prevent and contain outbreaks, while the efficiency of the response to the earthquake in Nepal showed that preparedness was the best defence to an emergency.

There have been many large-scale emergencies in the region over the past decade, such as the earthquakes in Bam and Pakistan; and floods in Pakistan; cyclones in Oman; conflict in Libya, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen; complex crises in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia; and refugee situations in Egypt, Sudan and Tunisia. As a result, much has been learned about how to manage emergencies and which capacities are required to minimize the health impacts and address the health challenges.

It is important that we apply what we have learnt from these experiences in preparing countries to respond to emergencies and reduce the risks of any hazard in a systematic manner ensuring a sustainable approach. Only through an effective process, can an optimum level of preparedness be achieved in the health sector. The Regional Office plans to draft an operational action plan, based on WHO’s strategic guidance and global references to scale up emergency preparedness in countries. The action plan will include concrete variables and indicators so that the preparedness efforts can be measured, strengths and weaknesses identified, and progress monitored. This will support development of a more resilient health sector and improve preparedness capacity to respond to any emergency in light of all the regional challenges. Evidence-based research has been already initiated by three countries – Sudan, Islamic Republic of Iran and Oman – to validate the variables and indicators for preparedness.

Once the action plan has been developed, with measurable markers to monitor the progress of the preparedness capacity development, , countries of the region will be able to move forward with a roadmap to strengthen emergency preparedness and response at national and regional levels following an evidence-based approach.

Dear colleagues,

I would like to thank you all again, particularly those coming from outside the region, for this meeting. I am confident that you will have time to discuss in detail how to better prepare to respond collectively to potential emerging health threats from all hazards, which I again remind you is part of our shared responsibilities under the IHR.

I wish you success in your meeting and a pleasant stay in Cairo.