



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

**Address by**

**DR ALA ALWAN**

**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**to the**

**TECHNICAL MEETING ON MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH  
ACCELERATION PLANS**

**Cairo, Egypt, 6–7 March 2014**

Distinguished Experts, Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to welcome you to this technical meeting on maternal and child health acceleration plans.

As you know, maternal and child health remains a major public health concern in our Region. In response to this situation, an initiative on “Saving the Lives of Mothers and Children” to improve progress towards achieving Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 was launched in a high-level meeting held in Dubai, in January 2013. The meeting concluded with the Dubai Declaration, which was also endorsed by the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean at its 60th session.

The Dubai Declaration called for – among other things – the preparation and implementation of maternal and child health acceleration plans by the nine countries that have a high burden of maternal and child deaths, and which are considered priority countries for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. With close technical support from the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), all the nine countries have developed maternal and child health acceleration plans, and have started implementation. Five of them officially launched the plans.

Strategically, we have made sure that the plans for collaborative work between WHO and the MDG priority countries for the biennium 2014–2015 are aligned with the maternal and child health acceleration plans. UNICEF, UNFPA and other partners have allocated resources to the country plans, in addition to the budget committed by the countries themselves. From WHO, I have made available some US\$ 2.6 million as a start-up fund for the nine countries to initiate first response. However, there is still a gap that needs to be filled.

One of the key issues is to monitor the quality of care delivered to mothers and children as a result of the implementation of the plans. That is why we are in the process of developing a monitoring framework that will also help in tracking progress.

As the initiative recently celebrated its first anniversary and as all the countries have started implementing their acceleration plans, it is already time to review progress in implementation and to identify further actions to support the countries in achieving the planned targets. These actions will concern the different areas of work which can support maternal and child health, including human resources, medicines and supplies, research, to mention but a few. Together, the experts here today, and WHO staff from different technical areas, have a vital contribution to make in this regard.

Raising the funds required to support the continued implementation of the plans is a major challenge that I hope you will also address. The continued availability of resources will be crucial if these plans are to have a good chance of making progress towards the targets set.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This meeting is aimed at proposing the key directions and measures needed to further support the nine countries in the implementation of their maternal and child health plans, and in achieving the targets. The objectives of the meeting are to: first, to review the progress so far in the implementation of the initiative on Saving the Lives of Mothers and Children and the acceleration plans; second, to identify actions to support countries in achieving the targets set in their plans; third, to discuss the monitoring framework to follow up on the outcome of implementation of the plans; and finally, to advise on the next steps needed to speed up implementation.

I wish you a productive meeting and look forward to the outcome of your deliberations.