



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from

DR HUSSEIN A. GEZAIRY

REGIONAL DIRECTOR

WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

ALL WHO STAFF MEMBERS IN THE REGION

ON THE OCCASION OF NEW YEAR 2007

Dear brothers and sisters,

This has been a very eventful year for us in WHO. It is a year that has seen and is seeing many changes. After the death of Dr Lee, Dr Anders Nordström, the Acting Director-General has ably lead the Organization during the interim period. We now look forward to getting to know and working with the new Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan.

It has been an eventful mix of good achievements and some bad news. Egypt finally became polio-free. WHO played a significant part in this achievement and I commend all those who have given time and effort to the polio eradication programme over the years. I also was proud to see staff contributions to assist people in need in the various parts of the Region on a personal, not only professional, basis.

The Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal has become regular and timely. We now have a knowledge management strategy that will help us to better create, manage and utilize health information in the Region. We have for the first time managed to create a consortium of over 80 health institutions and research centres to share information resources. We have established partnerships and joint programmes with a number of institutions to work together to support the health-for-all goal in the Region. Looking at the Regional Office website and the different collaborative work spaces that have been created, I feel more confident that sharing experience and working together as a team has made a great contribution to our achievements. I believe that together we can achieve even more.

These achievements and our work have been faced with many difficulties and obstacles. Some of them are natural, others are man-made. The aggression on Afghanistan,

Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Somalia and Sudan are only examples of the suffering and misery facing the people of these countries. It is always heart-rending to see conflict in the Region, and opportunists taking advantage of situations over which people feel they have no control.

In addition to all that, we have witnessed yet again natural disasters to which our Region is so prone: an earthquake in Lorestan, Islamic Republic of Iran, drought in Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa, and flooding in Afghanistan and Somalia. All these disasters, natural and man-made, have displaced people from their homes, destroyed lives and livelihoods, and had terrible personal impact on individuals, families and communities.

At the level of the family of the Regional Office, I am pleased to say that we have been able to attract a number of talented staff who joined us this year and I would like to welcome them aboard. The year has also witnessed very sad moments as we remember colleagues who passed away while in service. We remember Dr Mohamed Ishaq Al-Khawashky, Dr Youssef Hersi; Dr Fawaz Shehab and Mrs Deya El Assra. Their memories will be with us for a long time.

WHO's role in helping people to rebuild their lives and their communities is but a small one, but make no mistake it is a significant role and one I am proud to be part of, knowing that the team I work with is highly professional, dedicated to the humanitarian cause and committed to achieving health for all.

Our Region is addressing a number of major health challenges. Avian flu and the threat it poses as the catalyst for a human pandemic influenza is now with us to stay. We will learn to live with it but we must not accept it and become complacent. The danger is ever present. The Region faces enormous challenges in the growing epidemic of noncommunicable diseases. With the levels of poverty and associated diseases in some countries still high, we are in danger of overlooking the very high rates of obesity and tobacco use in others. Cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and hypertension are rising steadily. The long-term solution lies in lifestyle, more exercise, and a return to simpler healthier diets. Road traffic injuries are at epidemic proportions and not enough is being done to tackle the causes. We also continue to face major health system and health workforce challenges and are at a stage where these must be tackled head on if long-term health development is to be sustainable.

As we approach the new year, which so happily coincides this year with Eid El-Adha El Mubarak, I urge you to pray with me for peace and tranquillity, for economic prosperity and above all for health for all in the Region. I offer my special wishes to each and every one of you for inner peace, faith and serenity. Let me wish you and all your families, peace, health and happiness in the coming year.

Hussein A. Gezairy, MD, FRCS
Regional Director

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