



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

**Address by**

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**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**to the**

**OMAN NATIONAL LAUNCHING CEREMONY OF THE VACCINATION WEEK  
IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

**25 April 2010**

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I address you today at this momentous event, the launch ceremony for the first Vaccination Week in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. I would like to extend a warm welcome to His Excellency and our hosts for inviting us to this event.

A year ago, I stood with Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization, together with the WHO Regional Directors for the Americas and Europe and pledged our Region's support for the Vaccination Week initiative. Today I am proud to announce that Oman is one of the 22 countries of the Region participating in this historic initiative, signalling to the world that immunization is a regional and national priority. Vaccination Week in the Eastern Mediterranean also coincides with similar endeavours established in two other regions—Vaccination Week in the Americas and European Immunization Week. This unprecedented collaboration among the three regions, with well over 100 countries participating in simultaneous vaccination weeks, will provide further momentum towards a global vaccination week.

In our region, the goals and objectives of Vaccination Week are to enhance communication and dissemination of information on the importance of immunization, and to use a combination of innovative approaches to increase community demand and improve access to immunization, particularly for the vulnerable populations in the Region.

During Vaccination Week, a variety of activities are being carried out by Oman and other participating countries, including workshops, training sessions, social mobilization,

round table discussions, exhibitions and media events, addressing a wide range of vaccine-related issues. In addition, there will be vaccination services, such as tracking of unvaccinated people, implementing large-scale vaccination campaigns and using Child Health Days to deliver an integrated package of life-saving health interventions.

Vaccination ensures good health. Since we have adopted the regional vision that “no child should die from vaccine preventable diseases”, we have made great progress in reducing illnesses and deaths. More people than ever before are being reached with immunization; 20 countries have maintained their polio-free status; the 90% measles mortality reduction goal has been achieved three years ahead of schedule and an increasing number of countries are introducing new and underused vaccines.

Oman, in particular, has demonstrated remarkable success in immunization. Oman has sustained routine vaccination coverage above 95% for all antigens since early 1990. Also, vaccination coverage for all antigens is above 90% in all districts. New vaccines have been introduced in a timely manner based on solid evidence, and the strategy for measles elimination has been well implemented. Oman is one of the few countries in the world that has received WHO and UNICEF certification for its central vaccine store.

However, more needs to be done in the Region if we are to reach the Millennium Development Goals aimed at reducing child mortality. Despite our efforts, an estimated 2 million people in our Region were unvaccinated in 2009. Reaching these vulnerable populations – typically living in poorly-served remote areas, deprived urban settings and in war-torn states – is one of our biggest challenges.

Furthermore, about 1.3 million infants and young children worldwide die every year from pneumococcal disease and rotavirus diarrhoea, mostly in developing countries. A large number of these deaths can be prevented through vaccination with newly available vaccines. But the increased cost of introducing new vaccines into national immunization programmes will require additional financial commitment from governments, donors and partners. Therefore, innovative mechanisms to mobilize resources are urgently needed to assist countries.

The consequences of failing to immunize people at risk cannot be overstated. For example, the re-emergence of diseases that were formerly under control, the spread of diseases to countries where they had been eliminated, and the continuing toll on millions of people in terms of illness, disability and death.

Let us use Vaccination Week as an opportunity to revive political commitment to, and increase public awareness of, the importance of immunization. It is my firm belief that our continued collaboration will make this initiative a success. Remember, vaccination is a family and community responsibility, and vaccination is the obvious choice.

Thank you.