



Opening remarks

to

**17TH MEETING OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGIONAL WORKING
GROUP OF THE GAVI ALLIANCE**

Alexandria, Egypt 15–16 October 2010

Dear Colleagues

I have pleasure in welcoming you to the 17th meeting of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Working Group of the GAVI Alliance. As always, it is my pleasure to welcome colleagues from ministries of health, representing the immunization programmes as well as health systems departments, along with their WHO and UNICEF counterparts. I also wish to extend my very warm welcome to our colleagues from WHO headquarters, UNICEF regional offices, the GAVI Alliance secretariat and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

It is almost ten years since the GAVI Alliance came into existence and started to support the immunization programmes initially, later expanding this base to the health systems as a whole with the ultimate objective of further strengthening the immunization programmes. During this period countries in the Region receiving GAVI Alliance support have generally made substantial progress in their immunization programmes. I am sure you will join me in congratulating the immunization programmes in Somalia and southern Sudan where a breakthrough has been achieved and substantial increase in coverage has been reported for 2009. In Somalia reported DPT3 coverage increased from 31% in 2008 to 52% in 2009 and southern Sudan from 26% in 2008 to 43% in 2009. However, with regard to new vaccine introduction they have been a little unlucky as the level for eligibility of Alliance support has now been set at 70%.

The progress in introduction of new vaccines has been satisfactory in the Region as a whole, and in fact outpaced the available resources for new vaccines introduction. As all of us know, these resources were unfortunately reduced as a result of the recent global financial crisis. Consequently the Alliance had to adopt a prioritization process and for this countries had to wait for new vaccine introduction for about a year. Nevertheless it is good to note that the process has been re-established. Yemen is ready for pneumococcal vaccine introduction

and northern Sudan is set to introduce rotavirus vaccine in 2011. Pakistan has been approved also for pneumococcal vaccine introduction.

The support of the Alliance has been unique in many respects. One key feature in this regard was the creation of an environment where the countries started taking the first step towards financial sustainability of immunization programmes through co-financing of the new vaccines. The progress in payment of the co-financing share had been remarkable, with all the four countries required to make co-payments having fulfilled this obligation. This progress is indicative that, with time, countries will further build this process of financial sustainability.

Dear colleagues,

There is increasing consensus among national health policy-makers and programme managers in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and especially low-income countries, that health systems matter a great deal in achieving better health outcomes. This issue has gained increasing significance in recent years as attention has turned to health system development and strengthening at programmatic levels in order to improve service delivery and overall health system performance. Immunization coverage is often constrained by health systems barriers that are not specific to immunization. Eligible countries were encouraged to use GAVI HSS funding to target the prioritized “bottlenecks” or barriers in the health system that impede progress in improving the provision of and demand for immunization and other child and maternal health services.

Recently efforts have been made to strengthen coordination with the various global health initiatives, which include the GAVI Alliance, Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and International Health Partnership Plus, to make the health architecture more effective globally and at the country level. GAVI HSS is therefore complementary to other global health initiatives and implemented in coordination with the various development partners. We are very proud of the fact that the Eastern Mediterranean Region-eligible countries have been among the first countries to submit successful proposals and achieve acceptable implementation. The WHO Regional and country offices have led the coordination involving all partners. In this, the vaccine preventable diseases and immunization and health management support programme teams have collaborated closely all along. This has been a productive and mutually beneficial collaboration at the regional, country and Ministry of Health levels. Health system strengthening provides a horizontal platform enabling all vertical programmes to come together as one team.

Periodic joint missions are regularly organized to eligible countries in order to support implementation follow-up, monitoring and evaluation, financial management assessment, to overcome implementation obstacles and to help countries access and maximize utilization of global health initiative funding sources in ways that address their priority health needs. The Regional Office also organized the annual regional working group meeting, health system strengthening review for the annual progress report and peer review for draft proposals, to ensure consistency with both GAVI requirements and WHO technical guidance. During the Regional Committee meetings and WHO Representative meetings, the Regional Office organized parallel meetings with ministers and delegations to discuss GAVI-related issues, board decisions and the new health system strengthening one horizontal platform. The annual progress report and financial management assessment are crucial to the next phase of fund allocation submitted for Independent Review Committee and Board approval.

Dear Colleagues,

The GAVI Alliance, being a dynamic organization and having evaluated its achievements in the context of its objectives, has made significant policy changes recently. During the next two days, in addition to regional updates and progress from countries, you will hear from GAVI representatives about the latest policy changes. These range from change in eligibility criteria to modification of support for immunization services and will have significant effect on the countries receiving GAVI support. It is therefore very important to discuss and share any concerns you may have openly, during the meeting.

I hope you will make good use of this opportunity to gather all the information you require for accessing and continuation of GAVI support. As already noted, this is of particular importance with respect to recent policy changes.

We look forward to your feedback regarding the side meetings which were organized this year for the first time as an adjunct to the regional working group meeting, in order to have more focused country specific discussions. I hope you found them useful.

Once again I would like to thank all of you for travelling such long distances to participate in this meeting. I wish you a successful outcome and a pleasant stay in Alexandria.

Thank you.