WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean
ORGANISATION MONDIALE DE LA SANTE
Bureau régional de la Méditerranée orientale

منظمة الصحة العالمية
المكتب الإقليمي لشرق المتوسط

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from

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REGIONAL DIRECTOR

WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

to the

REGIONAL CONSULTATION FOR THE PREPARATION OF A TRAINING COURSE ON HEALTH PROMOTION AND EDUCATION FOR THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Kuwait City, Kuwait, 16–18 November 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this regional consultation for the preparation of a training course on health promotion and education for the Eastern Mediterranean Region. First and foremost I would like to extend my gratitude to the Government of Kuwait and to H.E. Dr Helal Mosaed Al-Sayer, Minister of Health, for hosting this very important consultation. It will certainly contribute to sustaining and improving the regional health agenda. In fact, Kuwait is one of the leading countries in the Region in implementing the regional strategy on health promotion. I would like to thank you all for bringing your global, regional and national expertise in the area of health promotion and education to this forum, to suggest areas for capacity enhancement.

This meeting was organized based on a genuine need and requests to enhance national capacities and skills in the area of health promotion and education. More than ever, it is important that health promotion and education initiatives are developed based on sound theoretical models and scientific evidence. The countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region are facing health challenges that require a more proactive role from health-promoting professionals. A sharp increase in noncommunicable diseases is a clear sign that immediate

action should be taken to provide people with the knowledge they need to prevent such diseases, and to orient policy-makers to the need to provide living environments conducive to health.

To illustrate the importance of shifting the way health promotion and education is conducted, let us consider two risk behaviours, lack of physical activity and unhealthy diet among children. Based on the Global School Health Survey, the prevalence rate of the combined risk factors – overweight, not being sufficiently active, and sedentary behaviour – is highest in the United Arab Emirates for both boys (27.8%) and girls (35.3%). The United Arab Emirates also has the highest percentage of obese schoolchildren: around 15.5%, with 17.1% for boys and 14.2% for girls. You may also know that about 60% of children who are obese before puberty will become obese in adulthood.

When we look at such findings, I'm sure you will agree that disseminating information about noncommunicable diseases through flyers and television spots will not suffice to have positive influence on risky behaviour, especially among children. Action must include understanding better our target population, in order to be able to have positive influence on behaviours through developing knowledge and skills, as well as action to influence policies and living conditions. These require a set of competencies and skills that range from being able to conduct operational research, design campaigns, and plan and implement interventions, to resource mobilization, partnership building and advocacy for policy change. Therefore, the role of health promotion and education professionals cannot be limited to producing printed materials or awareness-raising activities if they are to influence positively the health of citizens.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Building on the internationally and regionally agreed instruments, including the Ottawa and Bangkok charters and the Jakarta Declaration, the Regional Office launched a strategy for health promotion in the Eastern Mediterranean Region for 2006–2013 in 2008 and organized in 2010 an intercountry meeting where representatives of Member States agreed on a five-year plan for strengthening health education. Both instruments highlight the need to strengthen the competencies and skills of health promotion and education professionals.

This meeting is the result of a long process of research, consultation and work to respond to the needs of health promotion and education knowledge and competencies in the Region. The Regional Office has developed a foundation document that reviews all the concepts related to health education, and provides a clear and common understanding of concepts related to health promotion and education and related concepts. We are sharing this with you just prior to publication. We also developed a health literacy document for the 7th Global Conference on Health Promotion, which includes examples of how to improve the health knowledge and skills on selected topics, and this too provides background for your discussions. The Regional Office has conducted a situation analysis of existing competencies, skills and health promotion and education infrastructures in selected Member States. The results of the study showed notable shortcomings in terms of capacities available in countries and required for developing, implementing and evaluating health promotion and education interventions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You as experts in health promotion and education, are gathered to propose and agree on a practical course on health promotion and education for the Eastern Mediterranean Region that will be implemented on a regular and systematic basis. This course should be practical and valuable to health promotion and education professionals at national and field levels. It should be implemented as part of the agreed regional health promotion strategy and the five-year strategic plan for health education. During these three days, you will build on your experiences and discuss the proposed course objectives, structure, core content and implementation plan.

I wish you all the best in your efforts and a successful outcome of this meeting.