

Formal Opening of the Session

by H.E Dr Mai Al-Kaila, Minister of Health of Palestine

& Chair of the 69th Session of the WHO Regional Committee

for the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Your Excellencies,

Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, Regional Director

Dr Tedros, Director-General

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and honour to be addressing your Excellencies at the opening of this 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, as we return to a fully in-person modality.

Last time we met, the Regional Committee adopted some very important resolutions. You will recall the fruitful deliberations we had on key issues such as health security, One Health, the control of communicable diseases, promoting health and well-being, and digital health. We also discussed our regional perspective on the work of various intergovernmental processes mandated by WHO's Governing Bodies, such as those for the sustainable financing of the Organization, on amendments to the International Health Regulations and on the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body for a convention, agreement or other international instrument to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. The planned gradual increase in assessed contributions, with the aspiration of reaching 50% of WHO's core budget by the 2030–2031 biennium, is a historic step forward that will make long-term planning possible.

I am sure we are all looking forward to Dr Al-Mandhari's introduction to his report. Unusually, this year's report covers key developments not only in the last year, but during the entire

implementation period for WHO's regional vision, *Vision 2023*. So we will be hearing about plenty of achievements over the past five years.

But while we reflect on those achievements, we cannot forget that almost half the countries of our Region are facing complex challenges as they respond to humanitarian emergencies, fight disease outbreaks and try to maintain essential services.

The theme of this year's Regional Committee is "Moving forward towards a healthier future in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: promoting, protecting and delivering health for all by all". To move forward, we need to focus on the health of future generations. Their health must have more weight in shaping our strategic directions. We must do this together, collectively, and by building on our previous successes. We should not forget our experience in managing the COVID-19 crisis, which tested our collective ability to respond to such health threats. We must use the lessons we learned and the capacities we developed to better protect our populations in the future and make the world safer.

This year's session of the Regional Committee is also special in that we will nominate a new Regional Director. I would therefore like to express my deepest appreciation to the current Regional Director, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari.

Dr Ahmed, your total dedication, tireless efforts and visionary leadership have been instrumental in guiding our Region towards better health outcomes. Your commitment has been truly inspiring, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked alongside you.

As you have constantly urged us, we will continue to collaborate, innovate and advocate for better health for all and by all. Our Region is stronger and more resilient than ever, and I have no doubt that together we can overcome the challenges that lie ahead.

Thank you, and I wish you all a productive and successful meeting.