

**Introduction of the implementation report on *Vision 2023***

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**to the**

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Your Excellencies Ministers of Health and Heads of Delegations,  
Director-General,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In October 2018, I unveiled WHO's new vision of Health for All by All in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Now – in this landmark anniversary year for our Organization – it is my honour and pleasure to present to you a report on the implementation of that vision.

In doing so, I would also like to refer you to our new report on progress towards the health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Region.

It has been a very full five years.

WHO, our Member States and partners have much to be proud of.

Today, I would like to focus on some of our successes and what we have learned.

But I must start by being crystal clear: we are not on track to achieve the health-related SDGs by 2030.

Millions of people in our Region are suffering or dying from diseases that could be prevented.

As we have all seen in recent days, we are facing emergencies on an unprecedented scale and the challenges are escalating all the time.

We are not where we need to be.

But we can get there,

Our Region's impressive response to the COVID-19 pandemic proved that huge advances can be made in record time, if all available resources are used effectively, with strong leadership and partnership.

And we have learned enough over the past five years to know what works.

Every country in this Region has committed to reaching the SDGs.

Everyone in the Region will benefit if those commitments are met.

So how do we move forward?

Let me reflect on the key lessons from *Vision 2023*.

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Lesson number 1 is that resilient and equitable health systems save lives.

Investing in health systems is critical not only to achieve universal health coverage (UHC), but also to ensure global and national health security.

Last year, Your Excellencies adopted a new regional agenda for building resilient health systems.

Now, we need to deliver on that agenda.

We know what needs to be done.

We know that health systems must adopt an integrated, people-centred approach based on primary health care.

And there is already a lot of good work going on to make that happen.

We have used momentum from the COVID-19 response to drive longer-term advances.

Countries are enhancing care quality through initiatives such as the Patient Safety-Friendly Hospital Framework.

Infection prevention and control is now much stronger across the Region, and we have made good progress in tackling antimicrobial resistance.

And we have been working to improve access to medicines and vaccines. Efforts to increase access to COVID-19 vaccine led to huge progress in strengthening regulatory capacity and regional production.

But we need to hold onto our gains from the COVID response and build on them.

As the pandemic demonstrated, there are serious gaps and weaknesses in our health systems.

Our Region hosts tens of millions of refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons. We need to accelerate implementation of our regional strategy to reach the most vulnerable, and protect and promote their health.

And we need to do more to support the health workforce.

We have all seen how much we depend on them, and we have seen the pressures they face and the sacrifices they make.

Despite progress in recent years, we still do not have enough health professionals with the right skills and specializations – and all too often, those we do have seek better opportunities abroad.

WHO is working to address health workforce shortages, and in this Regional Committee session we are calling for accelerated action as a critical priority.

There can be no health without the health workforce.

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Lesson number 2 is that there are massive potential health gains to be made across the Region.

Together, we have the power to improve the lives of millions of people.

Let me start with polio.

We have never been so close to eradicating this dreadful disease.

Wild poliovirus is now endemic in just a handful of districts of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and only one genetic cluster has survived in each country.

This is remarkable. Just a few years ago we were facing explosive outbreaks of wild polio and vaccine-derived polio.

I would like to thank everyone involved in this success: governments, operational partners and funders, families and communities.

And I salute the courageous health workers striving to reach and protect every child in the Region.

We will never forget those heroic polio workers whose lives were taken even as they sought to save others.

Regional solidarity is critical.

The Polio Subcommittee that Your Excellencies established in 2020 has provided strong high-level leadership.

Several countries of the Region have provided generous support.

Egypt, Djibouti and Somalia are now using novel type 2 oral poliovirus vaccine (nOPV2), with more countries set to follow.

Polio teams are already supporting other immunization activities and emergency responses.

And in countries where polio has already been stopped, we are working to ensure a smooth transition of polio programme assets.

So thank you all but please, please, keep working.

We are winning.

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We also have to step up action on other communicable diseases.

We have seen some striking successes during the past five years.

We have restored core immunization coverage to its pre-COVID high.

Lymphatic filariasis was eliminated from Yemen, proving that victory is possible even in the most challenging circumstances.

Oman eliminated mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis.

Four countries eliminated measles and rubella.

And in a historic achievement, just last week Egypt became the first country in the world to be certified on the path to eliminating hepatitis C.

Millions of futures have been freed from illness, disability and premature death.

But there is so much more to do.

Nearly 30 million children in the Region are now missing measles vaccine doses.

Malaria and other vector-borne diseases are a growing threat and we need to take full advantage of new tools to combat them.

We are way behind in diagnosing HIV in our Region, preventing us from giving patients the treatment they need.

And while we have the best TB treatment success rate of any region, we need to make sure we find and treat every case – as Member States pledged to do at the UN General Assembly just a few weeks ago.

During the period of *Vision 2023*, we put in place the building blocks to support even greater success.

For the past two years, we have been rolling out the new regional strategy to support integrated disease surveillance.

Last year, Your Excellencies adopted a strategic framework to optimize support from Gavi and the Global Fund.

And you also endorsed a new regional operational framework on One Health to address health threats across the human-animal-environment interface.

Now, we need to work together to accelerate implementation.

It has been a tough few years, but we cannot let our guard down now.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Noncommunicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease kill more than 2.8 million people each year in our Region.

More than half those deaths are premature.

We know how to prevent them.

But strong leadership is required to implement proven interventions.

WHO has been working systematically with countries over the past five years to improve the prevention, detection, monitoring and management of NCDs.

And we are also working to foster mental health and improve psychosocial support in a huge variety of settings, from primary health care to schools, to emergencies.

We have seen some solid advances.

Every country of the Region is now implementing a national nutrition policy or strategy, and many countries have introduced taxes on sugar and other measures to curb obesity and promote physical activity.

And more and more countries are standing up to the insidious menace of the tobacco industry. I am delighted to see that Jordan has just announced strong measures to cut tobacco use.

But we need to do so much more.

That is why, in this Regional Committee session, we are seeking Your Excellencies' kind agreement to extend the term of the regional tobacco control strategy to 2030.

And we are also proposing a new regional framework to support countries and partners to address NCDs effectively during emergencies.

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That brings me to lesson number 3: we must invest more in emergency preparedness and response.

The challenges we face are growing all the time – as you have seen, Your Excellencies.

The recent escalation in Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic, cholera and dengue outbreaks in Sudan, earthquakes in Morocco and Afghanistan, floods in Libya – these and other crises are taking a heavy toll.

The number of our people needing humanitarian assistance shot up from 63 million in 2018 to 140 million in September this year, and that figure will be even higher now.

But despite the challenges, there are grounds for hope.

Our response to COVID-19 saw an astonishing expansion in capacities across the Region.

A 100-fold increase in the number of labs with PCR capacity.

Functioning emergency operations centres in almost every country.

Critical care training for more than 50 000 health care workers.

And life-saving vaccination. We are now building on that experience to develop a life-course immunization platform that will include influenza.

We have also become more effective in managing emergencies more generally.

Our work has been highly rated in independent reviews of the regional COVID-19 response, the Whole-of-Syria Programme and the Yemen Emergency Health and Nutrition Project.

The WHO Logistics Hub in Dubai is a major global resource.

Iraq pioneered the Universal Health and Preparedness Review.

The trauma care pathway we developed in Palestine is now a pathbreaking regional initiative.

We are building back better with projects like the new Central Drugs Warehouse in Lebanon.

And for this Regional Committee, we are leveraging our regional expertise with a new framework to strengthen public health readiness for mass gatherings.

But we need to do more.

Core capacities under the International Health Regulations (IHR) have barely improved since 2018.

And we are struggling to sustain the new capacities built during the COVID response.

Your Excellencies, you must invest now to protect us all from the next pandemic.

And I urge you to make your voices heard in ongoing discussions to develop a pandemic treaty and finalize amendments to the IHR.

The future is in your hands.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

We have known for years that to enable the widest possible enjoyment of health and well-being, we have to tackle the underlying causes of health inequity.

During the period of *Vision 2023*, we learned a lot more about how to make that happen.

The report of the Regional Commission on Social Determinants of Health provided a shocking picture of the wide disparities in life chances between and within countries of the Region.

Let me give you just one statistic: maternal mortality ratios range from 3 deaths per 100 000 live births right up to more than 600.

I hope you will all support Somalia's endeavour to submit a resolution on reducing maternal and child mortality to the World Health Assembly.

The silver lining with such inequalities is that enormous health gains are possible. Bringing the worst-affected countries up to the average would save millions of lives.

WHO has been working with every country of the Region over the past five years to promote health in all policies and support targeted, evidence-based interventions across the life course.

The Regional Healthy Cities Network has grown from 64 cities in 11 countries in 2019 to 110 cities in 15 countries in August this year.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has established the first National Healthy Cities Network in the Region; Qatar has made all its municipalities healthy cities; and Tunis has been selected for a global initiative.

We are also moving forward with efforts to tackle determinants of health such as conflict, gender and climate change.

And as requested by the Regional Committee last year, we are developing a regional roadmap that will guide health promotion work for years to come.

To take the well-being agenda forward, we are seeking the Regional Committee's support for a new regional framework to strengthen road safety systems.

Around 15 people are killed every single hour on our Region's roads.

There have been some dramatic improvements in recent years – for example Saudi Arabia cut deaths by nearly 35% – but we need to do more.

We are also proposing a regional framework to address climate change.

Your Excellencies,

This is quite simply the greatest health challenge of the 21st century.

We are already seeing the impact in our Region.

Deadly flooding.

Water scarcity, droughts and dust storms.

Increased water- and vector-borne diseases such as cholera, malaria and dengue.

We must limit further damage.

Fourteen countries of the Region have committed to implementing the WHO COP26 Health Programme.

COP27 in Egypt and the upcoming COP28 in the United Arab Emirates have opened up opportunities for technical and financial support.

Please support the proposed framework to build on this momentum.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

My final lesson is that we can only achieve the transformation we need by working together.

That is the spirit of our vision health for all by all. And that is the message Dr Tedros has been pushing since he became WHO Director-General.

We must leverage all the resources we have – knowledge, technology, partnerships and above all people – for maximum positive impact in every country.

Together, we have already taken giant steps.

Countries are investing in their health information systems. Building research capacities. Using evidence to inform national policies and evaluate their impacts.

The regional network for evidence to policy now includes institutions from every country in the Region.

The number of WHO collaborating centres in the Region has increased by more than a third, expanding areas of collaboration.

Our flagship journal trebled its impact factor during the term of the vision.

And the regional strategy on digital health is set to power a new age of health gains.

We are also transforming WHO for this new age.

We have invested in our people. Building capacities. Developing Fellows and other new talent. Ensuring that the workplace is conducive, respectful and safe.

We have implemented comprehensive functional reviews to strengthen operations at every level.



We have opened new country offices in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar – and I would like to express sincere thanks to Their Excellencies and Governments for the trust shown in us as WHO.

And with thanks for the generous investment by the Government of Egypt, we are collaborating with the government and resident UN agencies to achieve a smooth relocation of the Regional Office to the new UN Common Premises. Construction is under way and the foundations have been laid.

We have consulted Member States to ensure that resource allocation reflects your priorities.

We have invested in regional evaluation and monitoring to enhance efficiency, transparency, risk management and organizational learning.

And we are implementing our regional transformation roadmap to foster a culture of innovation, inclusivity and accountability.

We have invested in communications capacity, expanding our reach and helping to strengthen WHO as a trusted voice on public health in the Region.

And we have begun to harness the full power of strategic partnerships to put health at the heart of the development agenda and achieve better health outcomes for all – together.

Through the Regional Health Alliance, WHO is now coordinating work alongside 16 other international agencies to accelerate progress on the health-related SDGs.

Above all, we have worked to ensure that the voice of Member States is heard loud and clear, and to strengthen leadership and health diplomacy.

We are working to further enhance governance through implementing recommendations set by the Agile Member States Group and delivering on the secretariat implementation plan.

And as Member States requested, we are developing country cooperation strategies (CCSs) as an essential condition for collaboration at country level. I urge all Member States and country offices to put a valid CCS in place as soon as possible.

Your Excellencies,

It has been my great privilege to lead WHO in the Eastern Mediterranean Region over the past five years.

My overriding priority has been to ensure that WHO serves the people of every country of the Region.

I have always kept in close contact with you, including through frequent calls and visits.

Thank you for your friendship and your engagement.

And let me also thank our partners and, most of all, the wonderful WHO workforce for their extraordinary wisdom, dedication and spirit.

As my term ends, I am pleased that we are mobilizing more resources from within the Region.

WHO will continue striving to earn your trust.

But I must tell you: we need more support.

I call on you all to step up action.

We can build a better future for everyone in the Region.

We can transform millions of lives.

I pledge to do whatever I can to help my successor make that vision a reality.

Together, we can achieve health for all by all.