



Message from

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**on the occasion of**

**World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day**

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Last year, the World Health Assembly agreed that 30 January each year should be World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day. This will help to raise awareness of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) as a critical public health challenge and sustain progress towards their elimination. In the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region we are proud that the initiative to recognize World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day was proposed by the United Arab Emirates and then adopted unanimously by the Health Assembly.

NTDs are most prevalent in the world's poorest regions, where water safety, sanitation and access to health care are often inadequate. Furthermore, they disproportionately affect the poorest of the poor and the most disadvantaged, including children, women and the elderly.

In 2019, 77.8 million people in WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region required interventions against NTDs that can cause sickness, disfigurement, disability and even death. Ongoing armed conflict and forced displacement of populations has led to increased exposure to infectious agents, increased vulnerability to many NTDs, and the resurgence or persistence of these diseases.

To end the suffering of many people in our Region, more attention and funding needs to be given to the most prevalent NTDs. For example, the Region faces more than 70% of the global burden of cutaneous leishmaniasis, yet insufficient funding is available to provide the necessary services to those affected.

Addressing NTDs requires cross-sectoral approaches ranging from bringing medicines to all those who need them to relieving the associated mental health burden and tackling fundamental human rights issues. Ensuring that NTDs are part of essential relief packages is crucial for health equity and can help to make universal health coverage a reality. The Eastern Mediterranean Region has already seen the elimination of lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem in Egypt and Yemen, and of trachoma in Oman, Morocco and the Islamic Republic of Iran, so we know that success is possible.

On World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day 2022, WHO is calling on everyone, especially leaders and communities, to rally behind the goals of achieving health equity to end the neglect of poverty-related diseases and transforming neglect into care. Only then can we achieve our vision of Health for All by All.