



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Address by

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To the

CELEBRATION FOR A CERTIFIED MALARIA-FREE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 12 March 2007

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

To begin, I would like to congratulate His Excellency Mr Hamid Mohamed El Katami, Minister of Health, United Arab Emirates, for eliminating malaria from the United Arab Emirates and for its certification as malaria-free. I wish to acknowledge with great appreciation the commendable efforts made by the malaria control staff in the United Arab Emirates. They have achieved the objective of keeping the country free from local malaria transmission for the past 10 years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is a historic day in our fight against malaria, not only in the United Arab Emirates but also in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and in the world. Malaria is still a priority health problem in many areas of the world. Every year about 300–500 million people around the world suffer from malaria, one million of whom die of it. Many of them are small children and young adults, including pregnant mothers. Malaria elimination in the United Arab Emirates sets an excellent example for those countries suffering from malaria. The United Arab Emirates is a model for how a country can make a commitment to eliminate a disease to prevent suffering in the community. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, malaria afflicts around 10 million people and kills 49 000 of them every year. More than 90% of the cases in the Region occur in six countries (Afghanistan, Djibouti, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen). Malaria transmission is occurring at low level and in limited areas in three

countries, Iraq, Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia which are also targeting elimination. Ten countries of the Region have eliminated malaria, including the United Arab Emirates, and a further three countries (Egypt, Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic) have recently reported no local cases.

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Certification of malaria elimination requires proving beyond a reasonable doubt that the chain of local malaria transmission by *Anopheles* mosquitoes has been fully interrupted in the entire country. The United Arab Emirates is the first country to be certified by WHO as malaria-free since Australia and Singapore were added to the official register of countries where malaria eradication was achieved in May 1981 and November 1982, respectively.

Based on a request for certification of malaria-free status, WHO jointly with the United Arab Emirates conducted an assessment between 2004 and 2006. The assessment process included record review, sero-surveys of residents in previously active foci and among temporary immigrant workers, updating of national policies including the laboratory services, and field visits by WHO-led evaluation teams. These assessments and the subsequent reviews by members of the WHO Expert Committee on Malaria concluded that the national surveillance system and health service are efficient in detecting and proactively managing malaria infections, and that there is no evidence of ongoing malaria transmission. Certification of malaria elimination in the United Arab Emirates was granted in January 2007, based on the situation at present and the likelihood that elimination can be maintained.

Dear Colleagues

Malaria elimination does not necessarily imply the complete elimination of disease vectors. It also does not imply a complete absence of reported malaria cases in the country. Imported malaria cases will continue to be detected due to international travel. The potential for re-establishment of malaria transmission is therefore of concern due to the ongoing presence of vectors and imported malaria parasites. You will appreciate that the United Arab Emirates is receptive to resumption of malaria transmission and therefore vulnerable because of the high influx of temporary immigrant workers. In this respect, particular attention should be given to the strategies for maintaining malaria-free status which include: active surveillance involving both the public and private sectors; full case investigations; entomological monitoring; malaria awareness among the population; coordination between the various national services dealing with immigrants or international travel; and

strengthening measures for malaria vigilance among health and medical professionals to ensure registration, prompt treatment and reporting of imported cases.

I would like here to draw your attention to the importance of having the entire Arabian Peninsula free of malaria. It is imperative that as malaria is controlled in endemic countries, the neighbouring countries are also protected and preserved as malaria-free. In this regard I commend the efforts of the countries of the GCC for extending their generous financial support to Yemen, where malaria is still a public health problem. I hope this generous contribution will increase and continue until all of the Arabian Peninsula becomes free of malaria.

Once again, I wish you all success in maintaining the United Arab Emirates free from malaria and I assure you of WHO support to achieve this objective.