



*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

**Message from**

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**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**to the**

**EIGHTH INTER-REGIONAL MEETING ON THE COORDINATION OF  
OPERATION MECACAR-VIP**

**Budapest, Hungary, 8–10 September 2003**

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the eighth interregional meeting on the coordination of Operation MECACAR. I wish to express my gratitude to the Ministry of Health of Hungary for agreeing to host this meeting. I am very pleased to welcome national staff involved in poliomyelitis eradication and representatives of UNICEF, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Rotary International, and all partners in the global poliomyelitis eradication initiative. I wish also to welcome staff from the WHO Regional Office for Europe and WHO headquarters. I regret that we have lost one of the main engineers of MECACAR, namely the late Dr Aslanian, who passed away just over two months ago. We will, however, not forget him, not just because of MECACAR but also for what he did for polio eradication in both the Eastern Mediterranean and European Regions.

Dear Colleagues,

Since we last met, the European region has successfully achieved certification of the eradication of poliomyelitis; I wish to congratulate them for this significant achievement. Operation MECACAR has contributed to this success by promoting coordination between national programmes and also with partners in their efforts to eradicate poliomyelitis. As a matter of fact, the certification of the WHO European Region demonstrates, without a doubt, the success of Operation MECACAR.

In the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, we are witnessing significant progress towards the eradication of poliomyelitis. The Region's surveillance system is sensitive and is of certification standard throughout. Only one country in the Region, Pakistan, continues to experience significant transmission of the poliovirus. In two other countries namely, Afghanistan and Egypt, a few cases were reported a few months ago. However, there is every evidence that both are on the verge of stopping poliovirus transmission within their borders.

Dear Colleagues,

It is clear that the final steps to achieve a polio-free Eastern Mediterranean Region are not easy. However, I am confident that through your deliberations, you will critically review the country situations and make important recommendations on any joint efforts that are required to lead us toward the goal of poliomyelitis eradication.

I am also pleased to note that during this meeting you will discuss the future of Operation MECACAR. This innovative interregional initiative, although primarily aimed at the eradication of poliomyelitis from participating countries, has also demonstrated the capacity and potential for countries and international agencies to work together effectively to achieve a common goal. This collaboration should be exploited to achieve other health goals. I believe that your discussions on how to utilize Operation MECACAR to further enhance routine immunizations and measles control are appropriate and will be successful.

The firm commitment of countries represented at this meeting will be crucial to continuing the coordination of poliomyelitis and other activities across borders. As we are all too aware, infectious diseases do not respect international boundaries. Only with your continued efforts will we succeed in stopping poliovirus transmission and translating the lessons learned from this effort to the benefit of enhanced routine immunization and measles control activities.

Dear Colleagues,

I wish to re-emphasize that the successes we are witnessing are the direct result of the extensive efforts of national authorities, and the partnership support provided by WHO, UNICEF, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Rotary International and other collaborators. I am, however, confident that through the leadership provided by national governments and with the support of all the partners, we will successfully eradicate poliomyelitis in the near future. I also firmly believe that the national authorities and partners will do all they can to best utilize the strong and effective mechanism of Operation MECACAR to enhance other health initiatives.

In conclusion, I wish to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for your commitment and contribution. Children in the countries of Operation MECACAR have and will continue to benefit from your efforts. I wish you success in your deliberations and a pleasant stay in the beautiful city of Budapest.