



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Address by

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to the

WORLD HEART DAY INTERNATIONAL FORUM

**THE GOLDEN JUBILEE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF THE FRIENDS OF CHILDREN WITH
RHEUMATIC HEART DISEASE**

An integrated approach to the child with heart disease

Cairo, Egypt, 5–7 September 2007

Dear Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Golden Jubilee celebration of the Association of the Friends of Children with Rheumatic Heart Disease, celebrating 50 years of its glorious activities and at the same time, commemorating World Heart Day. As an Honorary Member of the Association of the Friends of Children with Rheumatic Heart Disease, I am proud to be associated with the celebrations and pleased at the opportunity to host the event at the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, in Cairo.

Rheumatic heart disease poses a major challenge to public health and is the most prevalent heart disease in children. Irrespective of the tremendous efforts of WHO during the past 50 years, rheumatic fever and the consequential rheumatic heart disease continue to exist in both the developed and the developing world. Indeed, it exists as a public health problem in many of our Member States.

In order to have successful and effective prevention and control programmes, it is necessary to recognize rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease as issues of high public health importance. In addition, newer approaches are needed to identify children who are at risk and prone to be afflicted by the disease. Newer methods should also focus on discovering and applying genetic markers for disease susceptibility.

For effective national programmes for the control and prevention of rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease, WHO is recommending the following steps: primary prevention activity aimed at preventing the first attack of rheumatic fever; secondary prevention activities aimed at preventing the recurrence of acute rheumatic fever and severe rheumatic heart disease; health education activities; appropriate training of health workers; epidemiological surveillance and community involvement.

Ladies and Gentlemen

One cannot talk about rheumatic heart disease in this Region, or indeed anywhere in the world, without referring to the work of the late Professor Zahira Abdin, founder of the Association of the Friends of Children with Rheumatic Heart Disease. An eminent figure at both regional and global levels, Dr Abdin dedicated her highly fruitful life to care for all her brothers and sisters in humanity, laying the foundation of several community-based and community-oriented projects, of which this Association is among the most prominent. Her deep interest in the youngest generation and her determination to guarantee them a healthy, well-educated and prosperous future, through her devotion and persistence, were among the many remarkable aspects of her generous personality. I, personally, along with all those fortunate enough to have known her and learned from her as a teacher, an educator and a nurturer, will remember her as an ideal and a role model as we try to follow in her footsteps to ensure good health and good care for all those who need it. May God Almighty encompass her with His Grace.

Once again, welcome to the golden jubilee celebration of the Association of the Friends of Children with Rheumatic Heart Disease.

Thank you.