In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message by
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WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION
on the occasion of
WORLD SIGHT DAY 2011 AND
THE INAUGURATION OF THE LIONS ASHMOON EYE CENTRE
Ashmoon, Menoufia, 13 October 2011

Your Excellencies Governor of Menoufia and Minister of Health

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you in celebrating World Sight Day 2011 and the opening of the Lions Ashmoon Eye Centre here in Menoufia, in collaboration with the Lions Clubs–District 352 and with the Ministry of Health, Egypt and our partners.

As many of you are aware, World Sight Day is an international day of awareness-raising, held annually on the second Thursday of October, to focus attention on the global issue of avoidable blindness and visual impairment. Today, as we celebrate World Sight Day 2011 here in Egypt, we are joined in an event that will be marked by other organizations and institutions around the world.

There is no global theme for World Sight Day 2011. This will allow each participating organization to use the occasion to highlight its own priority areas, in ways which will resonate with their own target audiences. However, in Egypt, we are focusing on the major causes of blindness – cataract, glaucoma, refractive errors, trachoma, and diabetic retinopathy.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the past 11 years, significant improvements have been made in advocacy, and in disease control for cataract and trachoma. However, there is a great deal left to do, especially in Egypt. Moreover, there are only nine more years remaining to eliminate the causes of avoidable blindness if we are to achieve the goal of the global initiative Vision 2020 – the Right to Sight.

According to the latest WHO estimates around 37 million people in the Eastern Mediterranean Region suffer from visual impairment due to eye disease or uncorrected refractive errors. Of these, 5.3 million people are blind, with around 90% living in low-income countries.

In Egypt, it is estimated that over 900,000 people are blind. The main cause of blindness is cataract, which can be easily operated upon in outpatient eye clinics.

In an effort to strengthen eye health in the rural underserved population, and to collect baseline data on blindness and visual impairment for the planning of eye care, WHO, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Egypt, and the National Eye Centre, Rod El Farag, conducted a rapid assessment of avoidable blindness in 2010 in the five governorates of Beni Suef, Fayoum, Kafr El-Sheikh, Minya and Sohag. The survey findings indicate that among these governorates, Beni Suef has the highest blindness prevalence rate – around 10% of the population above the age of 50 years.

I would like to emphasize that, although Egypt has the necessary infrastructure and human resources for eye care, there is a high proportion of blind people in the population. It is necessary to utilize these resources through proper planning, so we can advance eye care in Egypt.

WHO is working closely in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the National Eye Centre, Lions Clubs–District 352 and Rotary International and is planning to conduct a rapid assessment of trachoma in the four governorates of Fayoum, Kafr El-Sheikh, Minya
and Menoufia. In addition, it is providing support for developing a comprehensive district eye care plan for Beni Suef, Fayoum, Kafr El-Sheikh, Minya and Sohag.

It is my pleasure to congratulate the Lions Clubs–District 352 for the great initiative of establishing the Lions Ashmoon Eye Centre, in collaboration with Menoufia University, which aims at reducing avoidable blindness in the targeted rural poor population. Moreover, I would like to thank the Menoufia Governorate for donating the land in Ashmoon for establishing this Centre. We trust that the Lions Ashmoon Eye Centre will provide eye care services and facilities to the rural population, noting that there are no nearby eye care facilities.

Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) is a WHO partner and we are working together to support eye care activities and the childhood blindness project in Alexandria Eye hospital. It was our pleasure to provide technical support to Lions in establishing the Lions Ashmoon Eye Centre.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank H.E the Governor of Menoufia, H.E. the Minister of Health, and all those present with us today, particularly the Lions Clubs Governor Mrs Mohga Mahran, and Eng. Ahmed Salem, Former Governor, for their generous support for the establishment of this centre. I also thank all those organizations observing World Sight Day and those who are not present in this ceremony, including nongovernmental organizations, the private sector and universities. My special thanks also go to the media for their dedication and commitment to supporting blindness prevention activities.

On this World Sight Day, let us redouble our determination to build on past success and to rally our forces against the remaining obstacles, to ensure that access to eye care is available to the under-served blind population in the Region.

Thank you.