In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Address by

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to the
SIXTH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR CERTIFICATION OF POLIOMYELEITIS ERADICATION
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Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the sixth meeting of the Regional Commission for Certification of Poliomyelitis Eradication. It is a special pleasure to welcome members of the commission, chairs of national certification committees, national staff involved in poliomyelitis eradication from participating countries of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean
Region, and members of the Regional Certification Commission of the WHO European Region.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome, and my gratitude, to representatives of UNICEF, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, and Rotary International, our partners in the global poliomyelitis eradication initiative, and to staff from the WHO Regional Office for Europe and WHO headquarters.

Dear Colleagues

Considerable progress has been made towards polio eradication in the Eastern Mediterranean Region since your most recent meeting in May 2000. Since then, we have witnessed great intensification in the implementation of polio eradication strategies, particularly national immunization days and other supplementary immunization activities, as well as surveillance. In 2000, each of the six countries that reported indigenous polio cases—Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia and Sudan—conducted more than two rounds of national immunization days and additional mopping-up or subnational campaigns. The quality of campaigns in these remaining endemic countries has improved
substantially through house-to-house vaccination, greater emphasis on high-risk areas and improved planning and supervision.

Acute flaccid paralysis, or AFP, surveillance continued to improve all over the Region. I am pleased to note that AFP surveillance is in effect covering all areas in each country of the Eastern Mediterranean; and the required level of sensitivity that was reached for the first time in 1999— that is to say, 1 case of non-polio AFP detected per 10 000 children under 15 years—was maintained in the Region during 2000. The regional non-polio AFP rate is now 1.4 per 100 000 children under 15 years. The target rate has been achieved in 17 countries of the Region. The regional laboratory network continues to provide its substantial support to surveillance activities; and all the laboratories in the network in the Region are accredited.

The number of reported poliomyelitis cases has fallen significantly from more than 900 cases in 1999 to just over 450 cases for the year 2000 despite the great improvement in surveillance. Intensive control measures have led to the cessation of 1999’s polio outbreak in Iraq, with the last confirmed case from this outbreak in January 2000. Although polio is still endemic in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, there has been a
significant reduction in numbers of isolated polioviruses and in the number of districts from which wild viruses were isolated.

I wish to reiterate that the success we are witnessing is a result of the extensive efforts of national authorities and the partnership and support provided by WHO, UNICEF, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Rotary International and many other partners.

Dear Friends

It is with great satisfaction and pride that I tell you that parallel to the eradication activities, regional activities for certification of poliomyelitis eradication are gaining momentum. Five of the national certification committees of the eight countries whose reports were reviewed by your commission during its two most recent meetings have submitted revised reports in line with your comments. We have sent you copies of the revised reports. During this meeting you will review the documentation submitted by Cyprus, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. In addition, we have started receiving from these countries their annual updates for your review.
I am pleased to inform you that the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, together with UNICEF and our other partners, have conducted technical and managerial reviews of the polio eradication programmes in the remaining endemic countries in the Region. The review teams concluded that if high-level commitment to achieve polio eradication is continued with enhanced strategy implementation, it is likely that poliovirus transmission in the Region will cease around the end of 2001.

During the meeting, you will be briefed on the progress achieved so far in implementation of the regional plan for laboratory containment of wild virus and infectious material. Also, the format suggested for the national plans for preparedness for poliovirus importation will be presented and discussed.

Dear Colleagues

I wish you all success in your deliberations and look forward to reviewing your valuable comments. I am confident this meeting will be a step towards accelerating certification efforts in preparation for regional and global certification of polio eradication. All that remains is for me to wish you all a pleasant stay in Cairo.