



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

**Opening remarks**  
**to the**  
**AIDS REGIONAL ADVISORY GROUP MEETING (ARAG)**  
**Alexandria, Egypt, 16 November 2008**

Dear colleagues and friends,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Alexandria for the ninth meeting of AIDS Regional Advisory Group.

As you are aware, countries in our Region are still far from achieving the universal access goal of accessible HIV prevention, treatment and care for all those in need by 2010. Our priorities in the Region during the past year have been three:

- First, to assist national AIDS programmes in developing effective surveillance systems so as to better understand the dynamics of the HIV epidemic in their countries;
- Second, to support countries in developing and applying health sector intervention strategies and services with a focus on HIV care and treatment; and
- Third, to support resource mobilization through the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The very low coverage of HIV care and treatment in the countries most affected by the HIV epidemic in the Eastern Mediterranean Region is partly caused by the fact that few people living with HIV are aware of their infection. As discussed with you, and advised by you, during last years' ARAG meeting, we shall emphasize in our meeting this year strategies that will encourage and enable people to know their HIV status through professional services, and strategies to increase antiretroviral therapy coverage. Accordingly, we have dedicated one session in this meeting to discuss issues related to

the situation of HIV testing and counselling as well as HIV care and treatment in the Region.

In this respect we look forward to the exchange of views and experiences with you and to your critical and constructive comments and advice, which will enable us to intensify our efforts in these areas.

We have also dedicated one session in the meeting to ARAG members' contributions to sharing information and experiences on topics you would like to bring to the attention to all of us. Thank you, Dr Gouya and Dr Mohit, for the important subject you chose to debate with us during this session.

Dear colleagues and friends,

I take this opportunity to inform you that the Regional Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Sexually Transmitted Infections was endorsed by Ministers of Health at the 55th Session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean in October. This is a very important step in tackling a health problem that has been growing, but has remained hidden and unattended for a long time. We all need to work hard to control sexually transmitted infections which, besides having their own consequences and sufferings, also contribute effectively to the spread of HIV.

I do not want to elaborate more. Let me give the floor to Dr Riedner to present to us the objectives and the programme of our meeting.

I wish all of us a successful meeting and maximum benefit.