



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

**Message from**

**DR HUSSEIN A. GEZAIRY**

**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**to the**

**TWELFTH MEETING OF THE CEHA TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TAC)**

**Amman, Jordan, 20–22 October 2009**

Your Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have great pleasure in welcoming you to this notable occasion—the 12th Meeting of CEHA Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the Government Jordan for kindly hosting the Centre in Amman since 1985, and to the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) for providing continuous financial support over the years. We are also thankful for the substantial financial support provided by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Islamic Development Bank (IDB), Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), the Spanish Fund, and Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi (EAD), in order to meet the numerous environmental health challenges in the Region.

Counting on your support to CEHA, I am delighted to introduce to you Dr Basel Al-Yousfi, the successor of Dr Khan as the new Director of CEHA.

Your Excellencies,

The countries of WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region face a mix of traditional and modern environmental burdens stemming from both local conditions (such as poverty and conflict) and/or global phenomena (such as climate change). The people of the Region, especially those in the least developed countries, are affected by diseases associated with lack of access to safe water supplies, absence of sanitation facilities, breeding of disease-carrying vectors, as well as respiratory

conditions due to air pollution. However, the latest global report of the WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) on water and sanitation indicated that, with the exception of Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, the majority of the countries of the Region have made great strides in improving water supply services, with piped water supplies available to urbanized communities and to a significant proportion of the rural populations. Nevertheless, in most cases, countries are confronting major water scarcity, which poses serious challenges to drinking-water availability and quality. The Joint Monitoring Programme also reported that, again with the exception of Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, countries have made progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) sanitation targets. However, it is very likely that a number of Member States will not be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals related to water supply and sanitation, among others, unless bold policies and actions are implemented to that end.

At the same time, the populations in the Region are exposed to environmental threats and hazards due to untreated wastes, air pollution, toxic chemicals, deforestation, desertification and a host of other types of environmental degradations. Expansion of urbanization is a major phenomenon causing new environmental health challenges related to water, sanitation, environmental quality and waste management, in addition to increases in violence and injury, communicable and noncommunicable diseases, unhealthy diets and lack of physical activity. To highlight the significance of this issue, WHO has decided to mark its 2010 World Health Day by focusing on urbanization and health.

At the global as well as regional levels, climate change has now moved to the centre of the health agenda. The Director-General of WHO has identified this as a top priority, and in May 2008 the World Health Assembly passed a resolution calling for strengthened action to protect health from this emerging risk. In October 2008, the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean passed a resolution on protecting health from climate change and endorsed a regional framework for health sector action to protect health from climate change. In May 2009, the Health Assembly endorsed the WHO workplan relevant to this issue for strengthening of health systems to protect against risks from climate change. CEHA has been working closely with the Regional Office in developing a regional framework to combat the adverse effects of climate change, and will soon be launching a joint UN project in Jordan to address climate change and health, with special focus on water resources.

Lack of access to reliable and relevant environmental health information for decision-making is a clear dilemma in most countries of our Region. There is an urgent need to promote and strengthen multi-disciplinary collaborative approaches involving various sectors and ministries to ensure strong coordination and collaboration. To this end, WHO is taking the lead in calling for social determinants of health, such as income, education and environment, and their predictable impacts on people's health and security, to be addressed. Of particular concern are vulnerable groups. It is our considered opinion that unless environmental health is fully incorporated and integrated into the decision-making process at all political levels, sustainable development will remain an unreachable goal for many countries.

There is a clear confluence between the advent of climate change and the increase in natural and man-made emergencies and disasters in the Region. Populations are under threat of serious imminent and long-term environmental health risk. Unfortunately, most of the affected countries are not sufficiently prepared to be able to respond to the demands for water supply, sanitation and other environmental health services that are needed during and after disasters. With the support of the Regional Office, CEHA has been closely involved in planning and implementing environmental health activities in emergencies.

Your Excellencies,

Despite the limited human and financial resources available, CEHA, during its 24 years of existence as the technical arm and information exchange unit of the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean with regard to environmental health, has played a key and crucial role in reducing the burden of environmental risks to health and improving quality of life. This has been accomplished through CEHA providing continual technical support to strengthen national capacities and programmes in the Region. CEHA collaboration and service modalities have been enormously cost-effective. Financial analysis shows that CEHA received a total of 24 million US dollars in the past 24 years from WHO and raised 16 million US dollars from external sources for its mission in providing technical support and services to Member States of the Region.

Reductions in the availability of WHO's regular budget to CEHA have in the past posed a pressing challenge to Centre, and will continue to do so in the future. However, CEHA took the lead, with full support from the Regional Office, in developing collaborative projects with external funding partners and has been successful in raising funds for its activities in numerous Member States. The Regional Office in Cairo is committed to providing adequate resources in terms of

funding and staffing to maintain CEHA's minimum core functions and operations to meet the mounting environmental health concerns and environmental challenges in our Region.

CEHA's plan for 2010/2011 (coinciding with the Second Phase of our Mid-Term Strategic Plan 2008-2013) is very much in-line with WHO's strategic objective No.8 to "*Promote a healthier environment, intensify primary prevention and influence public policies in all sectors so as to address the root causes of environmental threats to health*". The CEHA plan addresses challenges and priorities, by providing technical support and practical guidance on emerging environmental health issues, and by promoting strategic approaches that are suitable to and achievable in our Region. There has been an increased focus in the current biennium on carrying out case studies and "pilot" projects (in Lebanon, Pakistan, Sudan and Yemen, among others) for demonstrating the feasibility of community-based initiatives (CBI) in solving environmental health problems, such as solid waste, health care waste, unhealthy schools and poor air quality. More pilot studies are planned in CEHA's workplan for 2010/2011 for promoting appropriate approaches and generating evidence-based information for establishing the close link between environment and health. Environmental health risk and impact assessment will be a key capacity-building theme, and will be closely linked with economic valuation activities, promoting prevention rather than treatment strategies in the Region.

In closing, I would like to invite, indeed urge, you all—distinguished representatives of Member States and UN agencies, regional and international organizations and donors within and outside the Region—to join hands with CEHA in order to meet, together, the environmental health challenges, to promote the environment

tal health agenda and to strengthen national capabilities and programmes in the Eastern Mediterranean Region; and, yes, to create a more sustainable and healthy environment for us and for future generations.

Allow me finally on behalf of WHO, to express my sincere thanks and deep appreciation to all of you, your governments and organizations for being here with us today as the Technical Advisory Committee of CEHA. I look forward to receiving your valuable input, critiques, observations and recommendations. We shall always be obliged for your continual support to CEHA. I sincerely wish you all a very pleasant stay in Amman, the beautiful capital of Jordan.

May God bless you.