



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from
DR HUSSEIN A. GEZAIRY
REGIONAL DIRECTOR
WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION
to the
PROGRAMME MANAGERS MEETING ON ELIMINATION OF LEPROSY
Beirut, Lebanon, 15–16 December 2010

Distinguished Guests, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the Programme Managers' Meeting on Elimination of Leprosy. I would like to thank the Ministry of Public Health of Lebanon for hosting the meeting and for providing the facilities necessary for its success. I also would like to thank HE Mr Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador for the Elimination of Leprosy, and Chairman of the Nippon Foundation who kindly accepted our invitation to attend this meeting in spite of his tight schedule.

Although most of the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region are considered to be low-level endemic for leprosy, several countries are in complex emergency situations which prevent the proper application of control strategies against leprosy. These countries include Afghanistan, Somalia and some parts of Sudan. Moreover, the Region includes one of the 18 countries with the highest burden of disease in the world, which is Sudan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the problems in leprosy control efforts is the presence of stigma and discrimination. As you know, the reduction of stigma and discrimination related to leprosy will have positive implications on case finding and compliance of cases to treatment. Efforts to combat stigma and discrimination have started to become more visible and practical. In this regard I was pleased to report that the Regional Office shared in the meeting that took place in Manila, Philippines in June

2010, at which the guidelines to strengthen participation of persons affected by leprosy in leprosy services were endorsed. I would like to ask you all to adapt these guidelines and apply their interventions in your countries.

During 2010, the new global strategy for further reducing the disease burden due to leprosy 2011–2015 was developed and endorsed. It is important that all our countries develop action plans to start implementing this strategy. In this regard, I suggest that national leprosy programmes report to this meeting annually on the progress in implementing the strategy in their countries.

I would like to encourage the important initiative that was recently introduced by the global leprosy programme on the establishment of a sentinel surveillance network for monitoring drug resistance in leprosy. The network is currently operating in eight leprosy-endemic countries, including Pakistan from our Region. Eight more countries plan to join the network including Egypt and Yemen from our Region. I hope more eligible countries from the Region will apply to join this network.

I can see that you will have a number of important sessions. I hope you will be able to reach practical recommendations at the end of the meeting and I look forward to receiving these.

I would like to thank our colleagues at the Global Leprosy Programme who are very supportive to our regional programme. I also thank all our partners who support the national efforts to further reduce leprosy burden especially World Concern International, Arkangelo Ali Association and International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP). Thanks are also due to Novartis Foundation which generously donates the leprosy therapeutic drugs to our countries each year.

I would like to thank the Nippon Foundation for its continuous support to leprosy programmes in WHO and in the countries. This generous support is crucial for the maintenance and success of leprosy control activities in the Region.

I wish you a successful meeting and an enjoyable stay in the beautiful city of Beirut.