



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from

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to

SUB-REGIONAL MEETING ON VIRAL HAEMORRHAGIC FEVER

TEHERAN, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

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Dear Colleagues and Distinguished Guests,

I am extremely pleased to welcome you all to this sub-regional meeting on viral haemorrhagic fevers. I take this opportunity to extend my appreciation to our esteemed colleagues from WHO headquarters, the Pasteur Institute in Iran and other United Nations agencies, for your presence here today.

In recent times, we have seen a resurgence of viral haemorrhagic fevers in our Region with a high number of deaths and disabilities. The repeated occurrence of these events is one of our major public health concerns and a growing threat to regional health security. Al-Khurma haemorrhagic fever, Chikungunya fever, Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever, dengue haemorrhagic fever, Ebola haemorrhagic fever, yellow fever and Rift Valley fever have all emerged in recent years in a number of countries in our Region, resulting in high death toll, substantial social and economic loss and other permanent loss of livelihoods.

In addition to the direct economic losses from these emerging infectious diseases, the health systems of the countries affected by recurrent outbreaks from these viral haemorrhagic fevers have also suffered setbacks. Because of the disruption of public health services and programmes that follow from these outbreaks, they have been unable to protect the health gains achieved over the years.

Dear Colleagues,

The occurrence of viral haemorrhagic fevers has been on the rise in the countries of the Region due to a number of ecological, environmental and climatic factors. These include increased trans-boundary movement of animals, and escalation of international travel and trade. They also include, but are not limited to, close contact of a large part of the human population with animals, encroachment of urbanization on wild life ecosystems, increased consumption of animal products, changes in nutritional habits and unsupervised slaughter of animals, among others.

The last few outbreaks have also exposed institutional weaknesses in the health systems, especially in the areas of surveillance and response, laboratory diagnosis, vector control, infection prevention and control in health care, as well as coordination and collaboration with other sectors, such as the animal and agriculture sectors. We need to address these gaps in order to avert more adverse consequences for the health sector. Therefore, we should deal with this particular issue with a great sense of urgency, to assess the current gaps in our understanding of the emergence of these diseases as well as public health strategies for prevention and control of outbreaks.

The WHO Regional Committee for Eastern Mediterranean recognized the growing threat of viral haemorrhagic fevers in the Region, and that viral hemorrhagic fevers could constitute public health emergencies of international concern according to the International Health Regulations (2005). Resolution EM/RC54/R.4 calls for development of national preparedness plans for early detection of and timely response to emerging outbreaks of viral haemorrhagic fevers that emphasize partnerships with veterinary and entomological services, timely sharing of information and institution of joint control activities. This meeting will contribute substantially to developing a regional strategy for prevention and control of viral haemorrhagic fevers in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Such a strategy will help the countries at risk to strengthen their national epidemic preparedness and response plan for control of such fevers.

I thank you all for attending this important meeting and for putting this issue at the core of your work. I am sure your experiences in managing such events over the years will be extremely valuable to our efforts to develop a public health strategy for effective prevention and control of viral haemorrhagic fevers in the Region. We must ensure that this strategy is implementable within the framework of International Health Regulation (2005), is

based on scientific evidence and follows a global vision of health security in an era of growing public health threats.

I would ask all of you to make the utmost benefit of this meeting through sound discussions, exchange of ideas and clear planning to meet the objectives. I wish you all a successful meeting and a pleasant stay in Teheran.