

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

**Address by**

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**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**to the**

**INTERCOUNTRY MEETING ON NEONATAL TETANUS ELIMINATION**

**Islamabad, Pakistan, 17–19 November 1996**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this Intercountry Meeting on Neonatal Tetanus Elimination. I am grateful to the Government of Pakistan, for its collaboration in hosting this meeting and for providing all the necessary facilities to ensure its smooth conduct. The first intercountry meeting on neonatal tetanus control in this Region, was held in the city of Lahore, nearly fifteen years ago in February 1982 and now we meet once again in our continued efforts to eliminate the disease. The meeting is being held with the objective of enhancing the prevention of neonatal tetanus with the hope of eliminating it in some countries of this Region.

Dear Colleagues,

Neonatal tetanus continues to contribute to the burden of infant death, and in countries where the disease is common it is responsible for a considerable proportion of infant mortality. An effective programme of control would significantly reduce the infant

mortality rate. As you are all aware, prevention of neonatal tetanus depends on two main strategies, namely, prevention of infection through clean delivery, and vaccination of mothers with tetanus toxoid.

I am concerned about the relatively slow progress achieved in the immunization of mothers against tetanus within our Region, particularly in areas at high risk where clean delivery is not ensured. There has been very little increase in tetanus toxoid coverage since the implementation of the expanded programme on immunization. Furthermore, neonatal tetanus surveillance is still very weak, hence the reported cases do not represent the real situation in many countries and the real magnitude of the problem is hidden.

I am sure that during the next few days, you will review the current situation of neonatal tetanus in your countries. You will also review and update your plans to reach the goal of elimination and formulate target activities. I would like to remind you that there are certain issues and special problems to be confronted in selecting and implementing strategies and approaches to accomplish elimination of the disease.

A realistic approach requires consideration of the nature of this hidden disease and requires it to be brought into the light so that it is fully understood by politicians and health planners. In addition, firm national commitment to eliminating the disease, with full support for the necessary activities should be obtained. Much can be accomplished using existing resources, but additional resources may be needed to achieve the elimination goal. I am sure that during your deliberations new ideas will be forthcoming for controlling and eliminating the disease. However, bear in mind that your plans should be realistic and implementable.

I have a strong conviction that neonatal tetanus will be brought under control and will be eliminated from the entire Eastern Mediterranean Region in the very near future. I would like to assure you that WHO will always supplement and support your national efforts in this regard. I wish you all success in your deliberations and may God Almighty give us the will and strength to be able to continue helping people to improve their health.

Thank you.