In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from

DR HUSSEIN A. GEZAIRY
REGIONAL DIRECTOR
WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

to the

SATELLITE SYMPOSIUM ON
BLOOD GENETIC DISORDERS—APPROPRIATE PREVENTION AND CARE:
APPROACHES TO ARAB AND ISLAMIC COMMUNITIES

Organized in conjunction with the Sixth International Conference
on Thalassaemia and the Haemoglobinopathies,

St. Paul’s Bay, Malta, 10 April 1997

Dear Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the opening session of the satellite symposium on blood genetic disorders which is organized by the Arab Group for the Study of Red Cell Genetic Disorders. I wish first to thank Professor Mohsin El Hazmi for inviting WHO to this symposium and for asking me to inaugurate it. I am sorry I am unable to attend in person owing to prior commitments. With the able leadership of Professor El Hazmi, I am confident that the Arab Group will have an important role in the prevention of genetic red cell disorders in this Region.

As you all know, the haemoglobin disorders and glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) deficiency are the commonest single gene disorders encountered in our Region. In
terms of magnitude, they represent major health problems and the associated chronic ill health and complications place a considerable burden on health services. Thus, there is a clear need for the establishment of organized national programmes for the prevention and control of these disorders.

Recognizing this need and the increasing importance of genetic and congenital disorders in general and genetic blood disorders in particular, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean undertook several initiatives to assist Member States in establishing programmes and in implementing control activities. The epidemiological situation of hereditary disorders was initially reviewed and a situation analysis paper was prepared and published. A Regional Task Force was formed by the Regional Office and met in Cyprus in 1993 when priorities in the prevention of genetic disorders were identified. The control of haemoglobin disorders was placed at the top of the list of these priorities.

Subsequently, in 1994, the Regional Office prepared position papers on five important priority areas: consanguinity, control of haemoglobin disorders, community genetics services, prevention of congenital abnormalities, and the role of education in the control of genetic disorders. These papers were discussed by a group of international and regional experts at a Regional Consultation held by the WHO Regional Office in Alexandria in 1994 and recommendations concerning regional strategies for the control of hereditary disorders were made.

Guided by the conclusions reached and the recommendations made during the Regional Consultation, a publication reviewing the epidemiological situation in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, discussing preventive strategies and providing technical and managerial guidelines for promoting and strengthening initiatives for the prevention and control of these disorders has been produced. I am pleased to launch this new publication “Community Control of Genetic and Congenital Disorders” during this symposium and I hope that some time will be allocated to present the objectives of the book and an outline of its contents.

As you will see, a major part of the publication focuses on the epidemiology, prevention and health care services required for the management of genetic red cell disorders.
Special emphasis has been placed on managerial requirements of the establishment of national programmes. I sincerely hope that this publication will make a positive contribution to stimulating action at the national level, to strengthening efforts to integrate the prevention of these disorders into the existing health care systems and to upgrading health care services to established cases in Member States. I also hope that this initiative will deliver a simple message to national authorities and members of the health profession in the Region: *While genetic disorders present a challenge to public health, their prevention and control is both effective and feasible.*

With the considerable achievements made in the control of infectious diseases of childhood in our Region, it is imperative for many Member States to respond to the increasing importance of the genetically determined disorders that are commonly encountered, such as the haemoglobinopathies. Accordingly, and also because genetics is a rapidly expanding field, there is a pressing need for public health professionals and clinicians with experience in the prevention and control of these diseases. I hope that national institutions and centres of excellence in this field, as well as nongovernmental organizations like the Arab Group, will play a leading role in bridging the gap and in strengthening national capabilities in this programme area.

Finally, I wish you a productive and enjoyable symposium and I look forward to the outcome of your deliberations.

May God bless you.