

**WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION**  
**Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean**  
**ORGANISATION MONDIALE DE LA SANTE**  
**Bureau régional de la Méditerranée orientale**



مَنْظَمَةُ الصِّحَّةِ الْعَالَمِيَّةِ  
المكتب الإقليمي شرق المتوسط

*HFA-Alex*

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

**Address by**

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**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**  
**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**to the**

**REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON HEALTH-FOR-ALL POLICY AND HEALTH  
SECTOR REFORM IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

**Alexandria, Egypt, 19–21 July 1999**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to the regional conference on health-for-all policy and health sector reform in the 21st century. I am delighted that we have been able to bring together an august group of experts to discuss this important topic.

During the past two years WHO at various levels has been involved in the formulation of global health-for-all policy in the 21st century. A draft regional document was prepared and discussed during the Forty-fifth Session of the Regional Committee in 1998, and a resolution was passed urging the continuation and expansion of the regional consultation process, and the organization of a regional conference in this regard; the

resolution called for the revised document to be presented to the Forty-sixth Session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean for approval.

The draft document was then widely circulated for comments. As a result, a new draft has been prepared and will be the subject of this consultation.

Dear Friends,

The world is witnessing an unprecedented movement towards globalization, supported by very rapid liberalization and global free trade and capital flow. Globalization is also supported by huge advances in communications, technology and transport. The establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) represented an important globalization milestone. All these developments will continue to have repercussions well into the 21st century.

The state of human development is improving but the overall progress is marked by great and increasing inequalities between people and countries and is threatened by potential setbacks. The inequalities that persist between poor and rich, women and men, rural and urban, and among different ethnic groups are seldom isolated; instead, they are interrelated and overlapping.

The impact of globalization on health systems is not well known, although preliminary studies forecast a negative impact in terms of equity and social justice. There will also be important bioethical implications. Although the WTO agreements refer to encouraging development and economic reform and take into consideration protection of health and the environment, the interests of developing countries, in particular the social sectors including health, appear not to have been taken into consideration during the negotiation phase.

Dear Colleagues,

Advances in medical technology play an important role in health system performance resulting in huge improvements in the field of preventive and curative care.

However, the use and abuse of medical technology account for a big share of the escalating costs of health care in both developing and developed countries. Recent developments in genetic engineering, organ transplants and cloning have had a real impact on bioethics and have raised serious concerns. Progress in health and biomedical technology has widened the gap between developed and developing countries as the latter lack the necessary resources, the appropriate expertise and easy access to sources of scientific information.

Health care systems in the 21st century will cover a very wide technical spectrum. On the one hand the most technologically advanced health systems will be based on up-to-date developments in science and technology. On the other hand, other health systems will still be struggling to satisfy basic needs and will still be based mainly on traditional medicine and basic health services.

The communications revolution is redefining the boundaries of health. Health information will be exchanged and health services will be provided across geographic and social boundaries. The recent advances in medical informatics, and in particular in the field of telemedicine, may well raise people's expectations and place additional strains on health delivery systems.

This clearly shows that global technical development does not provide for the essential moral framework for human development, which emphasizes the equal rights of human beings irrespective of their origin, race or religion. The orientation of the output of many of the ongoing global changes would have been different if the concept of human equality had been taken into consideration. In this respect, I wish to refer to the important statement in the World Health Declaration, adopted by World Health Assembly in May 1998, that the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being. In adopting the Declaration, the Assembly affirmed the dignity and worth of every person, and the equal rights, equal duties and shared responsibilities of all for health.

Furthermore, the WHO Constitution declares that the "health of all the people is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependant upon the fullest cooperation of individuals and States".

Dear Friends,

In response to the present status and projected future of the health sector, the World Health Declaration also noted the importance of developing relevant regional and national health policies and strategies. The formulation of national health policies should be based on clear, deeply rooted values and aimed at clearly defined targets that address priority health aspects. The values and traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean Region can provide a solid basis for health-for-all policy formulation. The main values that will contribute to the successful achievement of health-for-all goals in the 21st century are:

- a) recognition that enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental human right;
- b) implementation of equity-oriented policies and strategies that emphasize solidarity and cooperation;
- c) continued and strengthened application of ethics to health policy, research and service provision; and
- d) incorporation of a gender perspective into health policies and strategies.

In conclusion, global changes in many areas, such as economics, demographics and epidemiology, science and technology, and communications technology will have a tremendous impact on the health care delivery system in the 21st century. These developments should ultimately result in a significant improvement of the quality of health care systems, including health promotion, health protection and disease prevention and control. However, coupled as they are with the trend towards privatization and market economics, they will also be accompanied by a tremendous increase in the cost of health care services. It can therefore be expected that countries will experience increasing inequity in access to up-to-date health care technology and that the gap between health care systems both within and between countries will also increase. Such increases in inequity will have serious consequences for global health and stability. It is therefore important to develop national, regional and global health policies that are based on solidarity and cooperation, adherence to ethical standards and incorporation of a gender perspective. All these values are deeply rooted in the culture and traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean Region.