



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from

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to the

**JOINT WHO/ISESCO REGIONAL TRAINING WORKSHOP ON
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH RISK ASSESSMENT AND VALUATION OF
DEVELOPMENT POLICIES**

Amman, Jordan, 23–26 April 2007

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests and Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to welcome you to this Joint WHO/ISESCO Regional Training Workshop on Environmental Health Risk Assessment and Valuation of Development Policies, convened by the Regional Centre for Environmental Health Activities of the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Government of Jordan for hosting this workshop. I thank His Excellency Dr Sa'ad Kharabsheh, Minister of Health, for agreeing to inaugurate the workshop and extend my appreciation to all of the experts and participants for sparing the time and making the effort to contribute in this workshop. I also extend my special thanks to the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) for their joint support to this workshop.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

That health, environment and sustainable development are strongly linked is beyond doubt. A recent WHO global study on preventing disease through healthy environments establishes that almost a quarter (24%) of the global burden of disease and one-third of the burden in developing countries are caused by environmental risks. The study also found that environmental risk factors have an impact in 85 diseases out of the 102 diseases reported regularly by WHO. Heading the list of environmentally mediated diseases are respiratory disease, diarrhoea, malaria and unintentional injuries, respectively caused by polluted air, unsafe water and lack of sanitation, poorly managed water bodies, and poorly designed streets, cities and buildings. Noncommunicable diseases are also involved. Cancers may be associated with polluted air, chemicals or radiation. Cardiovascular diseases are associated with air pollution, risks at the workplace, exposure to chemicals such as lead and exposure to environmental tobacco smoke. The environment; also has an impact on suicide and violence violent behaviour, for example, can be triggered by exposure to chemicals such as lead compounds.

In order to protect health from environmental hazards, healthy environments must be promoted. This means being able to influence the policies of all sectors, so as to address the root causes of environmental threats to health. To meet this challenge, a range of actions is required, both in the health sector itself and cross-sectorally. The health sector needs to be equipped with the latest knowledge about the epidemiological impact of key environmental risks, and with up-to-date knowledge and tools for primary intervention. Health professionals also need to be better equipped with skills and methods for monitoring and synthesizing health and environmental data; and for advising on strategies for public awareness, and for protection and prevention.

Developments in sectors such as transport, energy, water resources, housing and agriculture, as well as other sectors, all have impact on health. Often development decisions are taken with very little or only token consideration of the health impact. Protecting health through healthy development requires the proactive engagement of the health policy-makers. They need to get involved in decision-making processes and policy forums that will have profound long-term implications for pollution, biodiversity and ecosystems—and thus for

health. While health sector actors cannot implement development policies on their own, they can provide the evidence, and the tools, methods and guidance for assessing the health impact of development, and for designing healthier policies and strategies. Vigorous leadership and advocacy from the health sector can sensitize non-health sector actors to the importance of environmental health as a fundamental value in development decisions. Most particularly, there is a need for evidence-based economic valuation of the environmental health costs of alternative development strategies or policy actions—so that health is always taken into full consideration by economic institutions and decision-makers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The aim of this training workshop is to familiarize professionals from the health sector with the guidance, tools and initiatives that can support the health sector in: influencing policies in other priority sectors (e.g. energy, transport, agriculture); in assessing health impact, and the costs and benefits of policy alternatives in those sectors; and in harnessing non-health sector investments to improve health, environment and safety. The workshop will introduce tools and methods developed by WHO and applied in the Region. These include environmental burden of disease assessment, environmental health indicators, environmental health exposure and risk assessment methods, and economic valuation of the burden of disease. Several case studies will be presented. As the case studies will demonstrate, the tools will be combined to produce a matrix combining the various policy alternatives in concerned sectors, their health benefits, the economic value of the health benefits, the associated investment costs, and the cost/benefit ratio for each alternative. The ability of health sector professionals to produce such a matrix will enable the health sector to influence development in other sectors.

I wish you all a very productive and successful workshop and a happy and pleasant stay in this beautiful city of Amman and a safe journey home.