



Address by  
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to the  
**LAUNCH CEREMONY OF RECOGNITION OF SHARJAH AS A HEALTHY CITY**

**Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, 30 September 2015**

Your Highness, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be with you for this launch ceremony organized by the Office of the Ruler of Sharjah. I congratulate His Highness and appreciate his leadership in making Sharjah the first officially recognized healthy city in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region. Let me share with you some of the challenges faced as a result of urbanization, regionally and globally.

At present 49%, almost half of the population, of the Region are urban dwellers. It is estimated that by 2030 two thirds of the world's population will live in urban areas.

Urban health challenges are becoming more acute and complex as a result of unplanned urban growth, which puts populations at increasing risk of poor quality of life, poor health coverage, poor infrastructure and sanitation, unsafe drinking-water, vulnerability to disasters, and hence higher risk of communicable and noncommunicable diseases, injury and mortality.

The situation is even worse in urban slums and disadvantaged areas where there is lower access to social services, including health services, and where over a third of the world's urban population lives. As a result, equity and social justice in accessing basic services have now become the guiding principles for development activities. The importance of health equity was emphasized by Member States in the Rio Political Declaration on social determinants of health and subsequently by the World Health Assembly in May 2012 (resolution WHA65.8).

The healthy city programme was initiated in Sharjah in collaboration with the World Health Organization in April 2012, under the leadership and support of His Highness, Sheikh Dr Sultan Bin Mohammad Al Qassimi, Ruler of Sharjah. As a result, health was placed at the top of the local agenda of decision-makers and substantial efforts were made to improve physical and social environments in Sharjah, in line with the healthy city concept.

According to WHO, a healthy city is committed to the health of its citizens, with its design and structure based on the needs of the citizens. A healthy city emphasizes equity, participatory governance and solidarity, intersectoral collaboration, and action to address the determinants of health. The role of civil society, including community groups and nongovernmental organizations, in local decision-making are among the specifications of a healthy city initiative.

When I took office as Regional Director in 2012, I advocated strongly for expanding the healthy cities programme, which was introduced by WHO more than 20 years ago and has helped countries to address many urban health issues. In order to build capacities of the countries to implement healthy cities programmes, the Regional Office has developed a set of training manuals, self-assessment and evaluation tools and an interactive website – the regional healthy city network website.

Sharjah was among the first cities that responded to our request by registration in the healthy city network, signing a letter of cooperation with WHO and establishing a healthy city programme coordinating committee.

Since 2012, WHO has undertaken two monitoring missions and an evaluation mission to assess the progress of the activities and their adherence to the WHO healthy city programme criteria and standards. I am pleased to announce that the result of the WHO evaluation that took place from 26 to 28 April 2015 was positive and the city of Sharjah is awarded Healthy City status, which is valid for the next three years.

The WHO evaluation tool focuses on implementation processes addressing the following seven major domains through 80 indicators: 1) health development; 2) community mobilization; 3) education and literacy; 4) skills development, vocational training, and capacity-building; 5) intersectoral collaboration, partnership, and advocacy; 6) water, sanitation, food safety and air pollution; and 7) emergency preparedness and response.

The evaluation report showed that the Sharjah healthy city programme is well structured and organized with the full support of the Ruler's Office. The management of the different sectors enhanced intersectoral collaboration through using the healthy city programme structural set-up for multisectoral action. Documentation, evidence-building and transparency were among the positive points reported by the evaluation team. Community engagement and participation in health and social development are materialized through local nongovernmental organizations.

I am pleased to note that family medicine is the main strategy for service delivery in Sharjah, with a comprehensive package of good quality of services that are accessible to all citizens. Another positive point reported in the evaluation report is the active engagement of nongovernmental organizations in health promotion and prevention, specifically screening of cancers, mother-to-mother training on breastfeeding, child nutrition, physical activities and child development

interventions. The healthy school initiative is a major strategy for school health in Sharjah which has received substantial support from His Highness, the Ruler of Sharjah.

The Sharjah healthy city programme addresses the social status of citizens through social care houses, provision of home health care services to the elderly, protection of vulnerable people and conduct of social and research studies, in collaboration with Sharjah University. In addition to access for all citizens to water and sanitation, food safety inspection and air pollution monitoring is in place in the majority of the healthy city programme implementation sites.

It was also reported that the emergency and disaster preparedness and management centre, stationed in the Sharjah Police Office, is a unique centre in the Region that should be replicated by other countries.

We are so happy to see that the sustained and effective political commitment and leadership of the Sharjah Executive Council has made the Sharjah healthy city programme a successful model that could, and should, be expanded to all cities of Sharjah and the United Arab Emirates. I am confident that His Highness will further support the establishment of a training centre as part of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, with the technical support of WHO.

Once again, let me appreciate your efforts, commitment and enthusiasm to health and social development and wish you healthy living in the healthy city of Sharjah.

Thank you.