



Opening Address by

**DR MAHMOUD FIKRI**  
**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

to the

**SIXTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE**

**Islamabad, Pakistan, 9-12 October 2017**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Your Excellency Mr Mamnoon Hussain, President of Pakistan

Excellency Dr Ferozuddin Feroz Minister of Public Health and Vice Chairman of the Sixty-third Session of the Regional Committee

Excellency Ms Saira Afzal Tarar, Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, Pakistan

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General

Your Excellencies, Ministers of Health, heads of delegations, ladies and gentlemen

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all today to the Sixty-fourth session of the Regional Committee.

Let me start first by thanking our host, the Government of Pakistan, for its kind invitation to hold this year's session here in this beautiful city of Islamabad and my special thanks go to Your Excellency, Mr Mamnoon Hussain, the President of Pakistan for your graciousness and generosity and for being with us here today. It is really an honour to every one of us in this room. Pakistan, in terms of population represents the biggest country in our region and we are very proud of its valuable contribution to the work of WHO not just at the regional level but globally.

I would like also to seize this opportunity to welcome Dr Tedros Adhanom as the new WHO Director-General who has come to the organization through the new transparent and participatory election process that WHO has adopted recently in which the DG is elected by the World Health Assembly and not only by the Executive Board.

Your Excellencies,

This is my first Regional Committee in my five-year term as WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. I must acknowledge the trust that Member States have placed in me to lead WHO's work in this Region at this critical period of time. This is truly appreciated.

Your Excellencies,

I am fully aware of your expectations and I will exert all efforts to fulfil the commitments I have made. I will ensure that WHO is on the frontline in providing health leadership in its technical support to countries of the Region and in focusing on the priorities to which I have committed in my statements to you last October and at WHO's Executive Board in January 2017.

I have set out a roadmap that underpins my vision for my five-year mandate as Regional Director. I aim to increase WHO's capacity to meet the needs of Member States by ensuring that WHO in the Region becomes increasingly effective, efficient, accountable and transparent.

I have made sure that priorities identified in the roadmap are properly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with clear and tangible results attained by the end of my term. Achievable and practical targets, indicators and milestones for programmes within each priority area have been identified in the roadmap and will be properly monitored.

I assure you that WHO will work closely with you all to achieve the targets of health-related SDG3 "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages". Achieving SDG3 calls for universal health coverage, as well as ensuring the continuous support to achieve the targets related to maternal, newborn and child health and noncommunicable diseases in the efforts of leaving no one behind.

However, we are facing increasing challenges in this region. Emergencies are destroying more lives than ever before. In 2017, almost 76 million people are directly or indirectly affected by political conflict, environmental threats and natural disasters. Health security threats, such as acute watery diarrhoea and cholera, H5N1, MERS, and polio, are also increasingly placing vulnerable lives at risk.

Despite all these difficulties, we will keep working closely with national health authorities and development partners, including United Nations agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and donors to coordinate the humanitarian activities, so together we can alleviate some of the pain and suffering of those affected.

A lot of effort is being undertaken in several areas of work across the Region but on top of all the Region is moving forward to finally eradicate polio. Sustained continuous support to all efforts of polio eradication, including frequent polio immunization campaigns in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Somalia need to be maintained. I would like to seize this opportunity to commend the tireless effort of both governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan, who are striving to make us part of a polio-free world. I would like also to congratulate Somalia on being 3 years polio free and to applaud the efforts of the Somali president for backing the programme emphasizing once more the importance of political will.

We have learnt a lot and we are more capable than before to have more successful stories. Measles elimination is our next target. Together we can do it.

I know how tremendously committed are our leaders in this region. I have seen this clearly during my meetings with some of them. I had the pleasure to meet the Presidents or Prime Ministers of Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon, Somalia, United Arab Emirates and of course Your Excellency Mr Hussain.

In conclusion, I have to emphasize that we must place health at the centre of development, focusing on the right to health, equity, fairness, universality and solidarity. We must see health as the smartest thing to invest in, which yields high returns. We must secure political commitment to achieve the SDGs, and truly we must leave no one behind.

Today, in your presence Mr President, and in the presence of all of your Excellencies, I feel very optimistic that, with the high commitment of all of you, we can end polio in our region. We can say for sure that the world will be polio free very soon.

Thank you all for your participation and looking forward to successful mutual deliberations and cooperation. والسلام عليكم و رحمة الله و بركاته