



Opening remarks

to the

**REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON MALARIA ELIMINATION AND
MALARIA-FREE INITIATIVES**

Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 13–14 June 2007

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the Regional Workshop on Malaria Elimination and Malaria-Free Initiatives here in Dubai. I wish to welcome our colleagues from WHO headquarters, our partners and the distinguished experts.

As you all know malaria elimination is of high priority in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The vision of the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is to expand malaria-free areas. A number of efforts for malaria elimination have been made in the Region in the past two decades. In 1990, Oman adopted elimination by decision of the Minister of Health. In 1997, five North African countries in a meeting in Tunisia adopted this strategy and committed themselves to a malaria-free North Africa. In 1999, under the Roll Back Malaria initiative, the Region adopted the Roll Back Malaria objectives, and added a further objective related to supporting malaria elimination wherever feasible. In line with the regional vision to expand malaria-free areas, special projects in certain geographical areas in endemic countries were adopted: malaria elimination in Socotra Island, Yemen (2002) and the Khartoum and Gezira States malaria-free initiative, in Sudan (2002).

In 2006, the WHO Global Malaria Programme adopted malaria elimination as a strategic direction and established an elimination task force. An informal consultation on malaria elimination was conducted in Tunis in February 2006. The concepts, gaps in technical knowledge, priorities in malaria elimination and the steps needed for certification of malaria-free status were identified. To provide technical guidance and build national capacity for elimination, the Regional Office has issued two technical publications: *Guidelines on the elimination of residual foci of malaria transmission* and *Guidelines on the prevention of reintroduction of*

malaria. A manual on the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of malaria elimination programmes is being developed by the Global Malaria Programme and will be published soon. The Regional Office is planning to design a specific training course on malaria elimination to provide quality human resources for implementation of the strategy.

Dear Colleagues

As you know, a malaria elimination strategy needs a phased approach in terms of location and time. Countries can initiate implementation of the elimination strategy in a certain geographical area or zone with suitable eco-epidemiology and expand as they gain more experience and more resources to other areas. In our region, countries are at different stages of implementation of this approach. Sudan is expanding the malaria-free initiative from two to four states, Iran is in the preparatory phase of elimination, and Saudi Arabia in the consolidation phase. Oman and Morocco are in the maintenance phase and very recently the United Arab Emirates has been certified as a malaria-free country.

Countries embarking on malaria elimination should ensure high level and sustainable political commitment and secure resources for very high quality implementation of malaria interventions. All malaria foci should be mapped using the latest available technologies, including GIS. Appropriate vector control measures should be implemented with the highest quality and maximum effective coverage, and all malaria cases should be confirmed, epidemiologically investigated and treated with the most effective drugs. Prevention of malaria among travellers to endemic areas is crucial for achieving malaria elimination targets. Strong malaria surveillance and border coordination are crucial for the malaria elimination programme and for maintenance of malaria free status.

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I trust you will review the achievements and challenges, share the experiences and identify the priorities for the coming 2 years. I wish you a very successful workshop and a pleasant stay in this hospitable and beautiful city of Dubai.