



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Opening remarks

to the

**INTERCOUNTRY LABORATORY TRAINING WORKSHOP ON MEASLES VIRUS
DETECTION AND GENOTYPING
Tunis, Tunisia, 12–16 May 2008**

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this important intercountry laboratory training workshop. I would like to thank the Government of Tunisia for hosting this workshop and for providing such excellent support and facilities. My thanks and deep appreciations are due to His Excellency Mr Mondher Zenaidi, Minister of Public Health, for his interest and support. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the Ministry of Public Health of Tunisia on the remarkable achievements of this country in the control of vaccine-preventable disease and for the support it has given to health development in Tunisia. I would also like to welcome and thank our colleagues from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta for providing continuous technical support for the regional laboratory network. My thanks also go to our regional reference laboratory and to the responsible officers of the measles and rubella laboratory network in the Region who are participating this training workshop.

As you know, one of the most important goals in the Region is measles elimination by 2010. In this regard, considerable progress has been made in lowering measles mortality, particularly through the use of supplementary immunization campaigns. To date, approximately 140 million children have been vaccinated. Accordingly, WHO estimates that the countries have lowered the number of measles deaths by 62% in the Region, from 102 000 deaths in 1999 to 39 000 deaths in 2005. This is a remarkable success.

However, demonstrating measles elimination will be challenging and will require extensive surveillance and monitoring of indicators and programme performance. Strengthening laboratory-based surveillance for measles is a cornerstone of the elimination strategy. In this regard, it is vital that plans of action for surveillance are coordinated between epidemiologist and laboratory personnel. It is also important to ensure full participation of the laboratory focal points in the measles surveillance process. Obviously, without serological testing of all patients with suspected disease, we cannot verify whether measles has been eliminated. In addition, we cannot determine whether the virus is indigenous or imported without genotyping all chains of transmission.

In support of measles and rubella surveillance, the regional laboratory network has made considerable progress in 2005 and 2006 by expanding and completing establishment of a national measles/rubella laboratory in all countries in the Region with full serology capacity. Laboratories are functioning at a high level of proficiency and meet both performance indicators and timeliness of reporting criteria on measles case-based surveillance, with laboratory confirmation reported in the monthly measles bulletin. The Region has improved its virological surveillance for measles, although gaps still remain in identifying measles and rubella virus genotypes in some countries.

To address this situation, the Regional Office has organized this intercountry training workshop for 11 countries (Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen), focusing on building capacity on molecular techniques for measles virus detection and genotyping. This will create a great opportunity to enhance the detection of measles virus and monitor the transmission of endogenous versus imported virus genotypes. I am very pleased to note that similar training was conducted in March 2007 as a result of which substantial progress has been made in the Region in terms of identifying measles genotype, through the implementation of the successful molecular techniques acquired during the workshop.

The purpose of the workshop is to provide intensive training in the application of molecular methods for diagnosis and characterization of measles and rubella viruses. The programme is organized to provide you with an opportunity to gain hands-on experience, coupled with comprehensive background lectures to update your knowledge and skills in molecular techniques

on measles RT-PCR, genotyping and sequencing, standards for quality control, analysis and validation of results.

Throughout the laboratory training workshop, you will be assisted by experienced experts demonstrating when and why each procedure will be used, the importance of each step in the procedure, and approaches to troubleshooting. The workshop ends with an exercise that is designed to test your understanding and ability to apply the various techniques learned during the training course.

Dear Colleagues,

I am confident that you will benefit from this intensive training workshop and will return to your countries with the skills to enhance the detection of measles virus and monitor transmission of endogenous versus imported virus genotypes.

Once again I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all of you for your efforts and participation in this workshop. I wish you every success and a pleasant stay in Tunis.