



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Opening remarks

to

**SUB-REGIONAL TRAINING COURSE ON INFLUENZA LIKE ILLNESS (ILI) AND
SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS (SARI)**

Teheran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 7–9 June 2011

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the pleasure to welcome you to this sub-regional training course on influenza-like illness and severe acute respiratory infections. I wish to extend my sincere appreciation and thanks to His Excellency the Minister of Health and Medical Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting this regional activity. I would also like to express my great appreciation to you for your participation, and thanks to our colleagues in WHO headquarters and the WHO Collaborating Centre for Reference and Research on Influenza in London, who have always greatly contributed in our activities in the Region.

Dear colleagues,

Each and every one of us has fresh memories of pandemic (H1N1) 2009. Fortunately, the pandemic was mild. However, it challenged all national preparedness plans and health systems in one way or another. In addition, several Member States in the Region could not fully implement their preparedness plans for various reasons.

One area that WHO has always recommended is the strengthening and maintenance of surveillance of epidemic-prone infections, including influenza. Influenza surveillance should be an ongoing activity throughout the year. The goal is not only to follow the activity of influenza A viruses but also to detect any novel viruses or development of resistance to antivirals as early as possible. Sharing of information on influenza viruses,

including virus isolates, through the network of influenza laboratories is essential for updating the composition of the annual seasonal influenza vaccine strain.

All this is costly and may divert resources from some other important health priorities of the countries, especially resource-limited countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

One of the alternatives to the complex costly routine surveillance of influenza is to establish sentinel sites that are geographically and statistically representative of the targeted population. The type, location, functions and networking of these sites are the subjects that will be covered during this training course, with specific attention to the roles of the laboratory and the connection between virological and epidemiological surveillance.

Dear colleagues,

This training aims to build capacities that will promote the development of effective sentinel surveillance systems for influenza-like illness and severe acute respiratory infections (ILI/SARI), and that will assist in close tracing of the virus activity and re-assortment. This in turn will help us in strengthening the preparedness for rapid containment of influenza pandemics and outbreaks of other communicable diseases in the Region.

I wish you all success with your training.

Thank you