



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message of

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to the

**REGIONAL CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON REVISING AND UPDATING THE
REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY AND PLAN OF ACTION**

Amman, Jordan, 6–8 June 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this regional consultative meeting on revising and updating the regional environmental health strategy and plan of action. I would like to thank all of you for taking your time to join us in reviewing and updating the strategy and plan of action, to respond to the current and emerging regional needs.

Following the occurrences in the recent past of a number of extremely serious environmental health challenges, including climate change, policy-makers are re-evaluating the existing environmental health strategies.

Declining water availability and quality, increasing populations, rapid changes in lifestyles, urbanization, unsustainable energy consumption and inefficient use of water resources are major public health concerns. Natural and manmade disasters and climate change are expected to aggravate most of these problems and to exacerbate their public health impact.

The Region also continues to struggle with traditional problems, such as solid waste, indoor and outdoor air pollution and liquid waste management, with inadequate policies and with a lack of public awareness for influencing such policies.

According to WHO estimates in 2009 for the Eastern Mediterranean Region, more than 1 million deaths could be prevented per year if appropriate environmental health interventions were available. Health systems do not yet identify the environmental determinants of health as a key priority for improving public health.

In May 2008, the 61st World Health Assembly passed a resolution calling for measures by both WHO and Member States to address health risks arising from climate change. Subsequently the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, at its 56th session, adopted a regional framework for health sector action to protect health from climate change. The framework provided countries with a means to assess the current environmental health infrastructure and problems at national level. The Regional Committee also agreed to develop, strengthen and implement effectively national environmental health programmes, to continue to monitor and evaluate environmental health activities, and to initiate mitigation and climate change adaptation policies.

WHO has identified six major health consequences of climate change: malnutrition resulting from food insecurity; deaths and injuries caused by frequent extreme weather events; increase in diarrhoeal diseases due to water scarcity and pollution; increased morbidity and mortality due to heat-waves; increased incidence of respiratory diseases due to worsening air quality; and change in the geographical distribution of disease vectors.

Actions to promote healthier environments are required both in the health sector itself and across sectors. Countries need to develop their national environmental health preparedness plans for emergencies, and to improve the access to information for research and decision-making. In order to ensure effective action in the health sector, risks have to be reduced or controlled in the settings in which they occur – homes, schools, workplaces and cities – and in sectors such as energy, transport, industry and agriculture.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Colleagues,

We are here all of us to finalize the draft regional environmental health strategy and plan of action through open and candid discussion. We will aim to improve the document as much as possible in our group discussions and to make sure that our final document has relevance for all concerned environmental health policy-makers.

On a global level, environmental health is becoming an increasingly important public health issue with increased focus on traditional environmental issues. The emerging

environmental health risks are also increasing because of the dynamic changes that are occurring globally and consequently affecting our region. Because of all these issues, it has become imperative to revise and update our regional environmental health strategy and plan of action.

In addressing environmental health WHO has covered a lot of ground since its early years. It has been recognized that more collaboration is needed with other United Nations agencies and nongovernmental organizations at country level where implementation of environmental health activities is taking place.

I expect that the technical consultation and your deliberations during the working sessions will indeed lead to concrete actions, as well as national plans of action.

I would like to thank you once again for your collaboration in finalizing this important document. Also, I would like to thank the Centre for Environmental Health Activities as well as the environmental health team in the Regional Office for their collective efforts in developing the draft regional environmental health strategy and plan of action. It only remains for me to wish you a successful consultation and pleasant stay in Amman.