



Address by

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to the

EXPERT CONSULTATION ON THE “STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR SCALING-UP RESEARCH FOR HEALTH IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION”

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Research is not a luxury that is affordable only in times of plenty but is a continuing necessity – and never more so than in hard times.” Global Forum for Health Research, January 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be with you today, to advocate for moving research for health forward in the Region and for the use of research results for the benefit of people’s health and development. I am also pleased to congratulate Dr Mahmoud Fathalla on being recently recognized in Austria for his contribution to research and ethics.

Your presence here today as experts and advisers to provide further guidance on how to strengthen the area of research for health is evidence that you believe that research is not a luxury, but a must in all times.

More than ever before, the countries of the Region are going through dramatic changes: political, demographic and financial. At the same time they are faced by the substantial challenges of climate change and food insecurity, to name just two. These circumstances require all of us to look for new approaches and institutional realignments both to be able to address the needs and to accommodate for the changes and transitions, based on evidence. We will need to address the gaps in resources, human or financial. Initial evidence shows that the political uprisings (which have been popularly termed “awakening”) in some countries have had impact on the health sector, increasing the need for operational research. One of the challenges that our region continues to face in this regard is to ensure that we have systematic

data and research on how health services work in crisis and in emergencies, including being prepared. Promoting a culture of accountability in research and its importance at all times continues to be of great importance in the Region.

You might ask, is this time to be working on a research strategy, while we have so many emergencies going on in the Region simultaneously? It is indeed the time to bring a message of need for continuity and of the importance of catching up with the world. Already, as you know, the World Health Assembly in 2010 endorsed a global strategy on research for health. This global strategy has provided us with an opportunity to take account of the changes taking place in the Region and to adapt the strategy to fit the regional context with all its uniqueness and diversity.

There is movement in the Region with regard to research. Many countries have shown an increased interest in and realization of the importance of research in general, and of research for health in particular, and in promoting health and well-being by identifying and addressing the needs of communities. This past month Jordan published a health systems research strategy for 2011–2015. Lebanon recently announced a joint initiative between a university institution and the Ministry of Health called “Vision 2020” for improving health care and health systems through innovative research. The United Arab Emirates has increased its contribution to the universities’ budgets for research in general, including health. More and more we are seeing the research for health initiative attracting stakeholders from different fields and areas—academia, civil society, policy-makers, funding agencies, and so on. Research for health calls for a multisectoral approach, and I would like to hear your views on how WHO can be a better convener for research for health in the Region.

The formulation of the regional strategic directions for scaling up research for health comes at an important time. The theme for next year’s World Health Report 2012 is “No health without research”. The phrase ‘scaling up’ takes into account the fact that there are already many good practices in the Region in conducting research. We need to expand upon these and give them more attention. Many of the success stories shared during collection of information for the regional strategic directions will be used to prepare the regional input to the World Health Report 2012. Your views on the definition of “success in research” and the impact of research for health will be of great value and I look forward to hearing them.

Once more, let me express my appreciation for your time and for your expert views. Let me take this opportunity to thank you all for your participation in this expert consultation and for your dedication to the field of research for health in the Region.

I look forward to hearing your views also on how best to implement the strategic directions. We will exert our collective efforts at all levels and throughout the various fields, to advocate for research for health not as a luxury but indeed as everyone's business.