

Address by H.E. Dr Abdellatif Mekki Minister of Health of Tunisia, and Vice-Chair of the Fifty-ninth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, Dr Alwan, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to open this 60th session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean. Let me thank our hosts, the Government of Oman and HE Dr Ahmed Al Saeedi, Minister of Health for their generous hospitality and kindness, and for making every possible effort to make this important event a success. We are all very pleased to be here.

I am pleased to speak to you on behalf of His Excellency Mr Bahar Idriss Abu Garda, Federal Minister of Health of Sudan, Chair of the fifty-ninth session, who has not been able to attend the session. It was my honour to be the Vice-Chair of the fifty-ninth session last year. Not only did we welcome a new Regional Director, Dr Alwan, we also endorsed a new vision and a set of health priorities for the Region. I see many new faces here today who I would like to cordially welcome, but many of you will also recall the important discussions we had on maternal and child health, noncommunicable diseases, health systems strengthening, the International Health Regulations and WHO reform, and the resolutions that we passed on these issues. Like me, I am sure you are looking forward to the report by the Regional Director on the progress made during the year on these and other issues. In this regard, I want to specifically acknowledge the new approach of organizing a technical meeting the day before the Regional Committee which we decided to have during our discussions in the 59th session last year on the rules and procedures of the Regional Committee. I am sure you all found the discussions we had earlier today most useful.

We have seen a number of very important health events in the past year and we are pleased to see the outcomes of some of these events which were diverse and extensive in terms of quality and quantity and consistent with the recent developments and changes in the Region. For example, many of us participated in the Dubai High-level meeting on saving the lives of mothers and children which took place in January of this year. All of the high-burden countries are committed to reducing maternal and child mortality and we are very pleased to see that all of them have finalized their acceleration plans.

However, the events, natural or man-made, which took place in some areas of the Region have called for concerted efforts with a view to minimizing their implications not to mention taking proactive measures against them. We must pay due attention to infectious diseases and especially be concerned at the risk to the global polio eradication programme with the outbreak in Somalia. We must continue to report all cases that occur in various countries.

In this regard, I would like to acknowledge the pooled procurement system of vaccines and medicines for all countries in the Region under the auspices of the Regional Office. This system will help reduce costs and provide more comprehensive coverage against the infectious diseases.

I would also like to acknowledge on all our behalf, Dr Alwan's leadership in dealing with the appearance of a new coronavirus in the Region. We must all be very vigilant to new diseases.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sure we are all looking forward to the new way of working during the Regional Committee, which we started last year. Once again, let me thank the Regional Director and his assistants for their interest to align the programmes in the Region with the real regional needs. Also I acknowledge the spirit of cooperation and harmony we saw in the Regional Committee session. I am sure this will continue under the new Chair and I look forward with you to a successful and busy session.

Finally, I would like to thank our hosts, the Sultanate of Oman for organizing this session and for providing the appropriate atmosphere for the success of our work.

Thank you.