

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from

DR HUSSEIN A. GEZAIRY

REGIONAL DIRECTOR

WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

to the

**INTERCOUNTRY WORKSHOP ON PROGRAMME
MANAGEMENT IN AIDS/STD**

Beirut, Lebanon, 16-24 June 1997

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this Intercountry Workshop on Programme Management in AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases. I would like to thank the Government of Lebanon for agreeing to host this important workshop. I also express my sincere gratitude to His Excellency, Mr Suliman Frengieh, the Minister of Public Health, for inaugurating the workshop.

As you are aware, the AIDS pandemic is spreading rapidly all over the world. Up to the end of 1996, a cumulative total of 8.4 million AIDS cases are estimated to have already occurred in the world, of whom 6.4 million have died, 1.5 million of them in 1996. AIDS is the final stage of the whole spectrum of HIV infection and hence represents the tip of HIV iceberg. In order to understand the magnitude of the pandemic, it is necessary to talk of HIV infections as a whole. During 1996, 3.1 million new HIV infections are estimated to have occurred taking the cumulative total to 29.4 million since the beginning of the pandemic. At

the current rate of 8500 new infections every day, the total is expected to reach 40 million by the end of this millennium.

The numbers of HIV infections and AIDS cases are still very small in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, compared to other regions. The epidemic started late in this Region and is spreading comparatively slowly, thanks to our social, cultural and moral values. But there is no doubt that the epidemic is spreading in this Region as well, as indicated by the increasing number of new AIDS cases reported every year. Hence, we must continue, even accelerate, our efforts for prevention and control of HIV/AIDS.

Sexually transmitted diseases are very common all over the world including this Region, and are responsible for high morbidity, serious complications and long lasting sequelae. Nearly 333 million new cases of curable sexually transmitted diseases occur every year—almost one million cases every day. Of these, 10 million cases are estimated to occur in this Region. These diseases not only cause morbidity and mortality on their own but also greatly increase the risk of HIV transmission. Therefore, control of sexually transmitted diseases is essential to reduce the morbidity and mortality due to these diseases and as an important strategy for prevention of HIV.

There has been considerable progress in a number of countries in prevention of HIV transmission through transfusion of blood and blood products. While these need to be sustained, other countries must strive hard to prevent this mode of transmission. A few countries have shown good progress in prevention of HIV through other modes of transmission and in care of persons with HIV/AIDS. However, much more needs to be done in order to consolidate these gains, to secure further gains and to achieve the goal of prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. A good national programme, with sound planning, effective implementation, and close and ongoing monitoring and evaluation, backed by high level commitment and adequate resources, is necessary to achieve this goal. In other words, we need efficient and effective management of such programmes. In order to assist Member States in good management of their AIDS and STD programmes, we decided to organize this workshop, which is the second of its kind in this Region.

AIDS is a major health problem and hence the health sector is actively involved in tackling this problem. However, AIDS has other implications as well—social, economic, political and legal. Therefore, the problem of AIDS cannot be solved by the health sector alone and requires a multisectoral approach with the active involvement of other sectors and nongovernmental organizations. The establishment of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) is a good example of multisectoral approach at the international level; among its cosponsors WHO has been encouraging and will continue to encourage the active participation of other sectors and nongovernmental organizations in national AIDS and STD programmes. We have, therefore, invited representative from both health and other sectors to this workshop, and I am glad to note that they have responded positively.

This is an intensive workshop in the sense that the participants will be actively involved from the beginning until the end. You will go through a series of training modules prepared specifically for this purpose, working on your own and assisted by the facilitators as and when required. I am quite confident that you will work hard in order to obtain maximum benefit from the workshop and to contribute significantly to the efficient management of your national programmes after your return to your respective countries.

I wish you every success during the workshop and a pleasant stay in Beirut.