

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean
ORGANISATION MONDIALE DE LA SANTE
Bureau régional de la Méditerranée orientale



مَنْظَرُ الصَّحَّةِ الْعَالَمِيَّةِ
المكتب الإقليمي شرق المتوسط

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

MESSAGE

by

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to the

**International Congress of the Egyptian Mental Health Nongovernmental Organisations in
collaboration with the Egyptian Psychiatric Association**

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Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to extend my warm gratitude to the distinguished organisers of this important congress.

As you are well aware, one of the main constitutional duties of World Health Organization is to act as a partner and assist nations in the provision of health for billions of people around the world. The same WHO constitution, which is the most important international health document in the world, regards health as a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not as the mere absence of disease. In order to fulfil these constitutional obligations and face the tremendous challenge of providing the basic requirements of health, WHO in 1978 sponsored the landmark Alma-Ata Declaration that called for the

provision of health through a system of primary health care. Soon after, it was felt that only through the integration of services within primary health care would it be possible to provide the minimum necessary mental health needs of the people. Since then, WHO has worked hard towards the realization of this goal.

The integration of mental health within primary health care should generally be regarded in light of several factors. The attitude towards mental health has been changing since the middle of this century. The reasons for this change are many. At the top of the list is the introduction of a more accurate and holistic definition of *mental health*, along with global socioeconomic changes and their effects on human condition in general. One can also point to new scientific discoveries regarding the etiology and treatment of mental illnesses and to the possibility of returning a considerable number of patients to their homes and the community. One of the major by-products of these developments is the introduction of much better coordination between general and mental health services. Integration of mental health within primary health care systems is a major product of this coordination. Accordingly, the objective of almost all of the national programmes of mental health that are developed in collaboration between WHO and Member States is to develop proper systems for the realization of this integration. Such programmes that have specifically been put into practice in the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region of WHO during the last decade have been blessed by a number of opportunities and struggled with a number of constraints. Thus, the future success and/or failure of such programmes depends on the correct understanding of these opportunities and constraints and on finding ways to deal with them.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The World Health Organization recognizes the professional associations and nongovernmental organizations as important partners in the area of mental health. WHO closely collaborates with many associations including the World Psychiatric Association and the World Federation for Mental Health. Regionally, WHO has always had useful and active cooperation with different psychiatric associations, particularly the Egyptian Psychiatric Association. Through the wisdom and support provided by all the distinguished professionals throughout the Region we have been able to see different issues in a more comprehensive perspective and plan for the future with a deeper sense of reality and vision. In a world with so much complexity in the enormous problems it faces, our profession, which by nature deals with

multifaceted dimensions of human well-being, is in need of unity among us. It is only through such unity, sharing and partnership that we may be able to find ways to manage the enormous task of keeping up with changes, absorbing the new scientific developments and providing better services for our patients. Only through such collaborations shall we be able to face the burning issues of mental health such as the care of chronic patients, problems of women, elderly and adolescents and substance abuse, as well as situation-dependent conditions like the plight of refugees, the problems of street children, psychiatric issues of AIDS and many other emerging issues of mental health. Congresses like this can considerably help our efforts.

Esteemed Colleagues,

Allow me to use this occasion to extend the heartfelt congratulations of WHO and myself to two very distinguished psychiatrists of our Region, Professor Ahmed Okasha, President elect, World Psychiatric Association, and Professor Omar Shaheen, the new president of the Egyptian Psychiatric Association, for their rightful election to these important offices. I am confident that our Region will witness great progress in psychiatry and mental health during their years in their respective positions.

In conclusion, I would like to once again extend my thanks to the distinguished organizers and to wish the congress a very successful outcome.