In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from

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OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS
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Your Excellency, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

I welcome you all to this Workshop on Environmental Health Impact Assessment (EHIA) of Development Projects, which is being convened by the WHO Regional Centre for Environmental Health Activities (CEHA) with the sponsorship of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Pakistan. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Pakistan for hosting this gathering, and special thanks to His Excellency the Federal Minister of Health for his kind support in the organization of this Workshop. My sincere thanks are also due to
those other Ministries who have responded so positively and sent representatives to the Workshop.

During the past decade there has been a growing awareness throughout the Eastern Mediterranean Region of WHO, of the need to use environmental impact assessment (EIA) as a statutory or administrative requirement to define and mitigate the negative impacts of development projects on the environment. Unfortunately, conventional environmental impact assessment does not take into consideration the potential health impacts of such development projects, either before, during or after project construction. It is essential that health authorities recognize the importance and use of environmental health impact assessment as an effective tool and mechanism to introduce human health and welfare considerations into development planning, in order to promote a “health friendly” environment. The environmental health impact assessment aims to predict and assess the impacts of a development project on environmental parameters which have a significance for health and quality of life. By predicting future changes in environmental factors, it is possible to indicate the potential changes in health which may be caused by a development.

Dear Colleagues,

The World Health Organization (WHO), as part of its mandate, places great stress and importance on the prevention of negative effects of development projects on health and on the promotion of a healthy environment. Further evidence of WHO’s leadership and role in raising awareness of environmental health impact assessment and promoting it among its Member States is clear from the global and regional strategies on health and environment, adopted in 1993 by the World Health Assembly and the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean. Both strategies require an integrated approach to health and environment management with the aim of sustainable development, as well as the use of environmental health impact assessment as a tool in promoting healthy development and a healthy environment.
The regional strategy also promotes health issues related to development projects at various levels. For example, at the policy level, development of guidelines, methodologies and approaches; and at the community level, raising awareness. As part of WHO’s drive to promote environmental health impact assessment as a planning and development tool for projects at regional level, five activities—a seminar, a consultation and three workshops—were held in 1991, 1994, 1997, 1998 and 1999 respectively. In addition, WHO’s Regional Centre for Environmental Health Activities (CEHA) has organized national seminars on environmental health impact assessment in many countries of the Region. WHO continues to promote the latest and most appropriate approaches, techniques and methods for assessing the impact of development on the environment and on health, in close collaboration and cooperation with relevant and concerned international institutions and agencies within and outside the Region.

Development projects and activities in our region include petro-chemical complexes; phosphate mining and fertilizer production; oil-drilling and refining operations; cement manufacturing; health, housing, tourism, water, wastewater and communications infrastructures; development of airports, roads and seaports; development of scientific, technological and educational institutions, and many others. This development has resulted in tremendous socioeconomic uplift and improvement in the quality of life. However, the adverse impacts on the environment, social structure and health were not adequately and properly assessed or addressed, either before or after each project. The use of environmental health impact assessment as a planning tool in assessing, predicting and mitigating adverse impacts has been very limited due to the lack of human resources trained in environmental health impact assessment, the non-availability of appropriate and suitable national guidelines and legislation, and the lack of national awareness and community participation in the environmental health impact assessment process. The use of environmental health impact assessment can result in maximum benefits being gained from development with minimum negative impacts on health and environment, eventually resulting in healthier environments and populations.
Dear Colleagues,

Recognizing the urgency of introducing environmental health impact assessment as a planning tool, this five-day regional workshop for selected countries aims to provide an appropriate opportunity and a forum for national senior policy-makers and decision-makers to learn about, review, discuss and identify the health impacts of development projects within a broader perspective. I am confident that this will enable you to make valuable contributions towards raising national awareness and sensitizing both industries and communities about the importance of the use of environmental health impact assessment. You will also be able to contribute to initiating the process of formulating national environmental health impact assessment guidelines and policies, which will then translate into practical national action plans for minimizing the negative health impacts of development activities in your countries.

In closing, I wish to thank you for your valuable time, your contributions and your participation in this important workshop and to wish you success in your deliberations. I look forward to receiving your positive input and constructive recommendations. Lastly, I wish you all a very pleasant stay in this “green” city of Islamabad and a safe return home.