



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from

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to the

**WHO/ISESCO REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON CHEMICAL SAFETY AND RISK
ANALYSIS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

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Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

I have the pleasure of welcoming you to this regional workshop on chemical safety and risk analysis in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, jointly organized by ISESCO and WHO. I am very pleased to see the importance Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization give to this field of chemical safety.

Member States have become aware of, and increasingly concerned about exposure to chemicals, particularly when major chemical incidents occur, such as the accidents at Bhopal involving methyl isocyanate, Seveso involving dioxins and Minimata involving mercury. More recently, fears about weapons of mass destruction has heightened awareness of the need to have a chemical safety programme. Chemical incidents cause fear and panic because chemicals have the

potential to cause large number of deaths and disabilities. Concerns have been increasing, not only among the public, but also among the scientific and medical community, that there may be long-term effects on human health, such as development of cancer, immune suppression and congenital malformation, resulting from chemical exposure. There is also concern that exposure to chemicals may give rise to diseases that are not recognized, or exacerbate diseases of another aetiology.

Member States of our Region have recognized through Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, that while the use of chemicals is essential in the development process they must be managed in a sound manner, so as to protect human health and environment. Humans are surrounded by chemicals, and are in perpetual contact, intentionally or unintentionally with chemicals in the environment, in food, water, air and soil. Countries in the Region need to develop policies for sound management of chemicals and to establish and implement chemical safety programmes at national, regional and local levels, taking into consideration the varieties of use and the need for inter-ministerial involvement.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Chemical safety is defined as “The prevention and management of the adverse effects, both short and long-term, to humans and environment, during production, storage, transportation, use and disposal of chemicals”. The general statement that “no chemical is entirely safe but all chemicals can be used safely” forms the basic philosophy behind all the efforts towards safe use of chemicals. This calls for policy direction at the highest level in government so as to ensure efficient coordination among all ministries and departments concerned with implementation of effective chemical safety measures.

The International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS) was established in 1980 by the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), to provide, through chemical risk assessment, an internationally evaluated, scientific basis on which countries may develop their own chemical

safety measures, and to strengthen national capabilities for prevention and treatment of the harmful effects of chemicals and for managing the health aspects of chemical emergencies.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992, defined an international strategy for environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals within the principles of sustainable development and the improvement of quality of life for mankind. Promotion of effective international cooperation with respect to prevention of, preparedness for and response to chemical incidents, including management of poisoned patients, follow-up of cases, and incident site clean-up and rehabilitation, is one of the important aspects of sound management of chemicals as identified by UNCED.

The Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean in its Forty-Seventh Session, in October 2000, urged Member States in resolution EM/RC47/R.9 to, among other things, strengthen their national chemical safety programmes and develop and strengthen poison information and control centres. The resolution also requested Member States to prepare a national chemical safety profile as soon as possible and establish a high level national interministerial coordination committee on chemical safety involving the Ministry of Health.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In spite of the inherent potential of chemicals to cause harm, it cannot be denied that chemicals are essential for national, regional and global development. Chemicals play an important role in modern society serving as the basis for industrial and agricultural innovation as well as for domestic hygiene, for example. Chemicals must, however, be produced and used in a safe and sustainable way.

Although significant progress has been made in many countries of the Region, it is still a fact that chemical safety management is weak. This workshop aims to review and identify weaknesses and strengths in chemical safety in the Region, to exchange information related to

chemical safety, and to create awareness that chemical exposure and poisoning are a growing health problem that require intersectoral partnership.

The WHO Regional Office at the regional level and the International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS) at the global level, in cooperation with many international and United Nations partners and the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety, are all working towards providing essential support to the Member States, to enable them to implement the six programme areas identified in Chapter 19 of Agenda 21. The full implementation of Agenda 21 was reaffirmed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 and I am very pleased by the support of ISESCO in this field.

Chapter 19 is basically a plan of work to ensure humanity is better prepared to use chemicals to its benefit. Agenda 21 proposes a balance of share in the responsibilities between governments and international agencies. The responsibilities of successful implementation of chemical safety, especially in the six programme areas identified by Agenda 21, lie primarily with the Member States, while the development of effective tools and methodologies is the responsibility of international organizations.

In this context, it is worth mentioning some of the excellent information and materials that IPCS has produced. For example, a computerized poison information package (INTOX), which is extremely useful for poison control centres for diagnosis, treatment and analytical toxicology, and Environmental Health Criteria (EHC) documents, which are very valuable for risk evaluation purposes, as well as other tools that you will hear about during this workshop.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I hope that the content of this workshop, and your deliberations, will lead to more examples of concrete action in your countries in the improvement of chemical safety programmes, with the ultimate aim of achieving successful implementation of chemical safety as identified by Agenda 21.

Finally, it remains only for me to wish you a successful workshop and a very pleasant stay in this beautiful and historical city of Cairo.