



*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

**Address by**

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**to the**

**SUDAN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES MINISTRIES OF HEALTH CONFERENCE**

**Khartoum, Sudan, 5–6 February 2003**

Your Excellency, The Vice President Dr Ali Osman Mohamed Taha,

Your Excellencies Ministers of Health

Friends, Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Indeed it is a great pleasure to be with you here today. Let me take this opportunity to thank the organizers for inviting me to address this very important conference, where neighbouring countries have come together to exchange information and share experiences on the efforts exerted in the fight against communicable diseases.

The countries that have joined hands here today in the fight against diseases extend from Egypt and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in the north to Uganda, Kenya and Congo in the south,

and from Chad and the Central African Republic in the west to Ethiopia and Eritrea in the east, with Sudan, the largest country in Africa, right in the middle. Between them they host more than 304 million people across an area of about 11 million square kilometres. These countries face common crises with similar hazards and vulnerabilities, including drought, floods, environmental degradation, land pressure, armed conflicts, acute food shortages and mass displacements, not to mention meagre resources and lack of access to any health services for vast numbers of people. Because of factors such as these, these countries are afflicted by an array of diseases, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, polio, malaria and other-vector borne diseases.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sudan has been the centre for many international and cross-border meetings over the past few years. To name a few, the polio eradication meeting in January 2001, the guinea-worm eradication meeting in March 2002, and the malaria cross-border meeting with Ethiopia in November 2002.

For polio, a Horn of Africa meeting was held in 1998, which concluded with an agreement on synchronization with regards to national immunization days and AFP surveillance but, sensing the threat that international borders posed, Sudan organized another meeting for ministers of health of its nine neighbouring countries in Khartoum in January 2001. The main objectives of that meeting were to obtain political and operational commitment from the respective countries to eradicate polio from the region through coordinated efforts in cross-border immunization, surveillance and information-sharing activities.

For malaria also, a cross-border meeting was held between Sudan and Ethiopia in November 2002 in Gadaref State with the objectives of exchanging technical information, sharing experiences, discussing and developing appropriate and acceptable strategies for malaria prevention and control, as well as developing synchronized basic strategies, such as case management, use of insecticide treated nets (ITNs), appropriate and culturally tailored IEC materials, and community involvement.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The objectives of this conference are not much different from those that have preceded, being mainly to strengthen the coordination between neighbouring countries on cross-border health-related issues and to develop a realistic interregional plan of action that can draw the required national, regional and international support.

Although considerable expansion in health services has taken place in the countries conferring here today, and significant gains have been made in the reduction of morbidity and mortality, people living at the peripheries and in border districts have not benefited much from those gains because of the unavailability and/or lack of access to such services. Thus, it is imperative to strengthen the disease control services in border districts and to collaborate with adjoining areas, with the goal of developing standardized programmes synchronized in time, space and content. The exchange of information between bordering districts needs to be encouraged, especially with regard to appraisal, early warning systems, planning and follow-up. A step-by-step sustainable approach from planning to implementation, ending in a thorough monitoring and evaluation process will be necessary.

To address this concern, cross-border assessments, workshops, and meetings need to be initiated and organized. At the global level, and in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, the World Health Organization continues to give particular attention and remains committed to supporting intercountry collaborative efforts aiming to curb infectious diseases. A sub-regional/geographical area strategic framework, that aims to improve and strengthen surveillance of communicable diseases will be highly desirable. Global partnership and regional collaboration with nongovernmental organizations and international organizations are required to ensure response on a timely basis.

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my profound appreciation to all the partners and agencies attending this conference, and to all the country health officials whose tireless efforts so often go unappreciated.

Your Excellency the Vice President of Sudan, your presence here today, despite your tight schedule, is very encouraging. For it conveys the commitment of the Government of Sudan to this very important cause. WHO, for its part will continue to provide technical support for the implementation of the recommendations that will ensue from your deliberations, bringing together global and regional experts as well as strengthening partnerships.

I have great hopes that this conference will bring about many changes in favour of border districts. Let us work together so that our hopes will be transferred into reality to the benefit of the well-being of everyone in these countries in general, and of those living in border areas in particular.

Thank you.