



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

**Message from**

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**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**ALL WHO STAFF MEMBERS IN THE REGION**

**ON THE OCCASION OF NEW YEAR 2006**

Dear brothers and sisters,

Once more the year comes to an end—a time to reflect and reminisce, a time to take stock of what has happened in our Region, what we have achieved, what we should have achieved, the lessons learned and, more importantly, to get closer to God and pray for our loved ones and all those in need.

We have experienced many crises and disasters in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, particularly in Afghanistan, Iraq, Islamic Republic of Iran, Palestine, Somalia and Sudan. However, perhaps the most devastating of disasters this year has been the Pakistan earthquake. I have personally paid two visits there, the most recent one being with our Director-General Dr Lee Jong-Wook. I have seen the survivors under extreme conditions, complicated by geographic inaccessibility and bad weather conditions. The surviving children have aged far beyond their years and this has given me many sleepless nights. I was proud to see how our team has worked tirelessly and endlessly, and we need to continue to work together with all UN agencies, nongovernmental organizations and other partners to try to alleviate the suffering and assist the government and the people of Pakistan in rebuilding the health infrastructure. We need to devise ways to keep both the assistance and attention on Pakistan. It was also pleasing to listen to affected people, government officials, United Nations agencies and nongovernmental organizations praising the work of our team.

On a global level—first with SARS and now with an impending pandemic that may emerge due to mutation of the current virus of avian flu—the countries of the world are putting together their preparedness plans if such a pandemic occurs. I urge you all as staff members to follow up closely and to be our ambassadors in relaying the correct information to your families and loved ones.

The World Health Day theme for 2005, “Make Every Mother and Child Count” was a bright and colourful one. What is more beautiful than to celebrate children and their mothers? However, with the many achievements in immunization coverage, polio eradication and IMCI, more attention needs to be given to keeping women alive during childbirth and to help improve life expectancy. This can be further illustrated through the classic example of a woman born in Japan with a life expectancy of 82 and one born in Sierra Leone expected to live until 36. This makes us really reflect on the importance of clean water, healthy lifestyle, healthy environment, sound nutrition, mental health and health services, and what our role can be in disseminating simple messages. The World Health Day school art competition held in our Region is an example of how we reach out to young people in schools, work with other ministries and help nurture children’s thoughts on health issues. Their paintings are always a joy to behold, especially this year’s entries on mothers, children and family.

The Region has shown potential for resource mobilization. The use of telethons on Arab satellite channels in response to the tsunami crisis and the Pakistan earthquake has shown the world that the Region can contribute and not only be on the receiving end. True, there is diversity among the countries; those that are rich and those that are poor, but the culture of donation for public causes needs to be adopted and people need to trust. This is where WHO’s years of credibility can come into play. It is indeed a big challenge.

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control came into force during February 2005 and has now become legally binding. This is a great example of how WHO has managed to mobilize governments and ensure the health of the citizens.

Another highlight of the year was the joint WHO/UNICEF global launching of the first World Malaria Report. This took place simultaneously in three major cities of the world: Geneva, New York City and, in our Region, Cairo. If anything, the report was another prime example of mutual collaboration between UN agencies and we look forward to continuing this trend.

The HIV/AIDS “3 by 5” initiative may have come to an end, however, for us in WHO, the programme remains high on the agenda with “Universal Access to Prevention, Care and Treatment” being the new goal. We have succeeded in reaching 1 million HIV/AIDS patients with anti-retroviral drugs—a far cry from where we started. Our Region however lags behind, but through the initiative, several countries have initiated the antiretroviral services and the numbers accessing care and treatment are on the

increase. The world's governments have worked hard to implement the programme, with the necessary budgets and anti-retroviral treatment having been made available.

Finally, I would like to say that you should all be proud to be working for an organization of such stature. Each and every one of you has contributed to that, whether working under very difficult circumstances in the field or here in the office in supporting their colleagues working in the field and providing them with all necessary technical, managerial and logistic input and smoothing away any sophisticated bureaucratic procedure that might hinder their performance. I am very proud of you and we should all strive together to keep our credibility high, perhaps now more than ever before. I take this opportunity to wish each of you the best for you and your families and may God bless you all.

Hussein A. Gezairy, MD, FRCS  
Regional Director

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