In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from

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to the
REGIONAL MEETING ON ESTABLISHMENT OF A REGIONAL AND NATIONAL OBSERVATORY FOR HUMAN RESOURCES FOR HEALTH AS PART OF THE HEALTH SYSTEM OBSERVATORY

Muscat, Oman, 16–18 December 2006

Your Excellency the Minister of Health,
Dear Guests, Consultants and Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first say how pleased I am to welcome you to this important regional consultation on establishment of a regional and national observatory for human resources for health as part of the overall health system observatory. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to His Excellency Dr Ali Bin Mohammed Bin Moosa, Minister of Health of Oman for kindly agreeing to host this consultation and for providing every support.
The establishment of observatories for health workforce is well in line with the theme of this year’s World Health Day and the priority set by WHO for the coming decade 2006–2015, which is devoted to addressing human resources development issues. Human resources development, as one of the functions, and building blocks, of the health system is receiving more focus at global, regional and national levels. New challenges are emerging. These include shortage of different categories of human resources; mal-distribution in both skills mix and in geographic areas; difficult and expensive pre-service education, production and retention. Also, effective management and development of the health workforce is disrupted by poor planning, poor coordination, migration and other problems. National health systems in all countries need to make the best of the educational institutes in this field to lead as centres of excellence and applied research alike.

Human resources for health are now widely recognized as the key element for achieving the health targets including the Millennium Development Goals and scaling up health interventions. At national level, the health workforce accounts for 2% to 8% of the total labour force and consumes more than 60% of national health care budgets in most countries. The importance of evidence for policy decision-making and the monitoring of progress in health workforce development and strengthening health systems is also widely recognized. Precisely defining and describing human resources for health can help to identify opportunities and constraints for scaling up and improving health interventions and outcomes.

It is widely acknowledged that an insufficient and imbalanced health workforce will continue to be a major constraint in attaining the health targets. Experience to date has highlighted the need for urgent action to scale up human resources for health, which will require coordinated action of countries and all other partners at all levels. Effective action, both urgent and sustained, requires solid information, reliable analysis and a firm knowledge base. But data, analysis and research on human resources for health and technical expertise are underdeveloped, in part due to chronic underinvestment. National and regional mechanisms must be launched to rapidly build the knowledge base which is
essential for guiding, accelerating and improving action. A culture of science-based knowledge building must, therefore, be infused into the human resources community.

It is empirical that basic information and data should be collected by all countries, backed by the Regional Office. Ultimately, the World Health Organization should fulfil its core responsibility for maintaining comprehensive global statistical systems – adopting standard definitions and collecting robust information on human resources. This way, appropriate strategic planning for future human resources for health can be made to provide the right number of workforce personnel with the right skills to meet not only the present health challenges but also to prepare to manage the future health needs and trends.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, interest in human resources development has been a priority for the past few decades. One of the major obstacles towards improving this development process at national level is the lack of reliable national data on human resources for health. Efforts have been focused on collecting data at global and regional levels. The Regional Office has supported several countries to accomplish comprehensive human resources for health mapping in 2005 as part of data published in the World Health Report 2006. So far only 14 out of the 22 countries have completed this exercise. The data collected were uniform as a result of the use of unified WHO templates and tools. Further use of such data by including more countries and establishing a national mechanism will contribute towards establishing an observatory for human resources for health as part of an observatory on health system development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although the collection of human resources for health data is relatively developed in some countries, analysis, interpretation and presentation of such data are often very weak, leading to a dichotomy between the providers and potential users of information. Information is needed to improve the policy, planning, production and management of human resources for health. So, acquiring information is not an end in itself.
The experience of the Observatories of Health Systems Development including Human Resources for Health in different places worldwide has shown that the observatory is an effective way to improve information and evidence and to increase advocacy for human resources issues. A regional human resources for health observatory is therefore proposed to support country-level efforts and strategies in order to address the issues highlighted above. This mechanism can contribute to a number of activities such as: Improving quality data; formulating and defining country profiles; producing relevant analysis and research; engaging with policy-makers; sharing and dissemination; national and intercountry networking; and contributing to capacity building for human resources development in general.

I am sure that all of you as participants in this meeting, with your excellent and long experience in this regard, can come up with clear and practical action plans in respect to the objectives of the meeting.

I take this opportunity to thank you all for accepting this responsibility and look forward to receiving the outcome of your deliberations and recommendations. I hope this meeting will result in plans and road maps for you to take home and engage with partners in implementing, and provide a pioneer experience to other countries in the Region.

Finally, I wish you every success in achieving the objectives of the meeting and a pleasant stay in beautiful and hospitable Oman.