In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from
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on the occasion of the
SIXTEENTH INTERNATIONAL SAFE COMMUNITIES CONFERENCE
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It gives me great pleasure to reach out to all those engaged in this very important conference—organizers, audience and agencies. I commend the hard work of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, Islamic Republic of Iran, in their endeavour to create a culture of safety in different settings, in collaboration with WHO, and in hosting the 16th International Conference of Safe Communities. I would also like to acknowledge the valuable contribution and leadership of the Karolinska Institute, Sweden, a WHO collaborating centre for injury prevention and safety promotion. For almost two decades the Institute has nurtured the concept of safe communities, provided technical guidance and created an enabling environment for translating concepts into meaningful actions.

Injuries and their consequences affect millions of men, women and children each year in communities throughout our region. The shocking part is that most countries and communities don't even think of injuries as a health problem at all. Injury, whether in our homes, at work and school, during sport and leisure activities, on the road or in public places, is a significant cause of death, illness and disability. The harm, both direct and indirect, from injury particularly affects children and young adults.

Globally, the burden of disease due to injuries has increased, from about 12% in 1999 to 15% in 2000, and is expected to rise even further by 2020. Road traffic injuries in particular are
on the rise, and it is estimated that by 2020 road traffic injuries will account for about 2.3 million deaths a year, almost double the current burden of mortality of 1.2 million deaths each year. The most worrisome aspect is that 90% of these deaths are expected to occur in the less motorized countries.

In the WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean Region, injuries are increasing in occurrence, in severity and in the fatality of their outcome. According to the Burden of Disease database 178 652 deaths in the Region, across all ages, were due to injuries in 2000. The major burden of death is borne by the low and middle income countries, with only 2199 of those deaths occurring in high income countries. The death rate per 100 000 population in our Region is particularly worrying. According to WHO statistical information, it ranges from 235 deaths per 100 000 population in Somalia to 34 deaths per 100 000 population in Kuwait (2002), with all other Member States in the middle of this range. Again the low and middle income countries show the highest rates.

The Safe Communities concept is one of a number of initiatives WHO has introduced for injury prevention. It is a concept that recognizes safety as a “universal concern” and a responsibility for all. The Safe Communities concept began its formal existence at the First World Conference on Accident and Injury Prevention held in Stockholm, Sweden in September 1989. The Manifesto for Safe Communities that came out of the conference states that “All human beings have an equal right to health and safety”. The Safe Communities model promotes creation of an infrastructure in local communities for action on injury prevention and safety promotion through building local partnerships. The Safe Communities programme is a programme designed to collect and analyse data, and allows citizens using the data to determine locations for increased enforcement of safety measures, provide increased community education and public awareness, and work with community leaders to reduce motor vehicle crashes and traffic incidents. Since its inception, the Safe Community programme has substantially increased its research activities, and has developed a network of Safe Community programmes around the world.

Through Safe Communities, WHO aims to help promote injury prevention and a culture of safety by sharing information about what works and what doesn't. This may vary from
community to community. There is vast experience with injury prevention and safety in the world and it is endeavours like this that encourage us all to share that valuable experience among the emerging Safe Communities. The Safe Communities programme is specifically designed to produce measurable outcomes that are important for individual communities.

To reduce injuries, we must all play our part. Partnership, between the private and public sector, community groups and agencies is essential to a community safety model that aims to reduce and prevent injuries, both globally and in the countries of our Region. Whether you're a safety advocate, medical or health professional, elected official, business person, law enforcement officer, religious leader, educator or a concerned citizen, Safe Communities can change the way your community looks at injuries, and influence the actions it takes to reduce its injury problems.

This important conference comes at a critical time for the world in general and this Region in particular. The quest for human health and safety has never received as much attention and recognition as now. I am sure the conference will give impetus to the continuing efforts of policy-makers from all sectors to create environments—whether homes, workplaces or roads—where everyone—children, young people, women, adults and the elderly—is safe. Feeling secure in our homes and on our streets is a fundamental right for all of us.

I wish you a successful conference and a positive outcome.