Address by

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REGIONAL DIRECTOR
WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION
CELEBRATING THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Your Excellencies Ambassadors of Member States in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region,
Dr Naeema Al-Gasseer, WHO Representative in Egypt, representing Ms Elena Panova, the
United Nations Resident Coordinator in Egypt,
Excellencies Heads of Diplomatic Missions,
Honourable Representatives of United Nations Agencies and Community Organizations,
WHO colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this celebration of World Health Day, which this year is also a celebration of the
75th anniversary of the World Health Organization.

In 1948, countries of the world came together to found our Organization. The wisdom of the
WHO Constitution guides us to this day in our mission to promote health, keep the world safe
and serve the vulnerable. We recognize that “the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard
of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being”, and we are working with
partners to make that right a reality. And for us, health goes far beyond the absence of illness;
it is a complete state of physical, mental and spiritual well-being that enables us to enjoy a
fuller, richer life.

Shortly after WHO was founded, the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean was
established, and our regional governing body, the Regional Committee, held its first session in
February 1949. The following July, the Regional Office began operations in Alexandria, where
it remained until it moved to this location in Cairo in the year 2000. I would like to give special
thanks to the Government of Egypt for hosting the Regional Office for all this time.

Among us today are some of the Organization’s pioneers – colleagues who have contributed
to its success over many decades. Let us take a moment to applaud them. Others are not with
us today, but we remember them all in our hearts and we cherish their accomplishments as we mark another milestone in WHO’s history.

We can celebrate many achievements. WHO led the eradication of smallpox and now we are close to eradicating polio. We have tackled and contained outbreaks, epidemics and pandemics like COVID-19, and developed strategies and guidance to help people across our Member States lead healthier and more productive lives.

As we observe the holy month of Ramadan, let us reflect on our values and remember those who need our support. This Region faces multiple natural and man-made emergencies and many people will not be able to celebrate with their loved ones.

Conflict is increasing in the Region with serious health impacts, and the only way that people’s health and well-being can be preserved is to address the root cause and find a political solution.

I myself witnessed the devastation following the recent earthquake in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic. I spoke to children searching for their parents, and parents grieving for their children. I visited the last hospitals standing among ruins and watched doctors fight to save their patients with whatever resources they had. As a doctor myself, I can tell you these resources were already too scarce.

Please join me in a moment of silence to remember all those who lost their lives as well as those colleagues who have lost their lives in the service of WHO’s mission.

Thank you.

Honoured Guests,

We must put aside our differences when it comes to peoples’ health and agree once and for all – as the creators of the WHO Constitution agreed – that “the health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent on the fullest co-operation of individuals and States.”

And we must redouble our efforts to achieve universal health coverage, so that good quality and sustainable health care is affordable and available to all. This will benefit everyone. Populations thrive when they are healthy. A healthier population is one that can promote and sustain health and well-being at all ages, leaving no one behind.
To mark the its 75th anniversary, WHO is introducing the WHO75 Champions initiative to reach new audiences, raise awareness of public health successes and milestones, and mobilize and inspire people to accept WHO recommendations and messages to support behaviour change. In the coming year, we will announce inspiring community leaders who will join us in promoting good health so that everyone can enjoy a fulfilling life in a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

I am delighted to announce today the first two WHO 75 Champions from the Eastern Mediterranean Region:

- The renowned Oud maestro from Iraq, Mr Naseer Shamma.
- And the World Masters Swimming Champion from Egypt, Ms Nagwa Ghorab.

We look back proudly on 75 years of achievements and challenges. And we look forward to the next 75 years of Health for All by All, and to achieving even more together.

Thank you very much, Ramadan Kareem, and a very happy 75th anniversary.