



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

**Message from**

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**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**to the**

**THE MIDDLE EAST POLIO OUTBREAK RESPONSE REVIEW**

**Beirut, Lebanon, 6-7 September 2014**

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me pleasure to welcome you to the Phase II Review of the Middle East Polio Outbreak Response. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Government of Lebanon for hosting the meeting and extending all the necessary support, and to His Excellency the Minister of Health for honouring us with his presence in this session.

I am very grateful to the national responsible officers for polio eradication for their commitment and continued efforts to achieve the target of polio eradication from the Region.

I wish also to welcome the representatives of the polio eradication partners from Rotary International and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as UNICEF and WHO staff from the field, regional offices and headquarters.

Dear Colleagues,

As you have noted from the agenda of the meeting, you will be reviewing reports from 8 countries of the two WHO regions, EURO and EMRO, in order to assess progress made in containing the Middle East Polio Outbreak since your last meeting. In this regard I sincerely hope that the national officers and their international partners will be able to clearly present and constructively discuss ways and means, not only of maintaining achievements, but also of guarding against potential problems on the final path to containing the outbreak.

During the Review Meeting in Amman, Jordan in April of this year five key recommendations were agreed upon. Those recommendations entailed; improving quality of our activities, targeting hard to reach populations, using innovative strategies, standardizing our monitoring, and sustaining vulnerability reduction. Over the past three months much work has been done by the partnership, led by your Ministries and supported by our agencies and partners.

Over the next two days we will hear of the progress made, the challenges experienced, and the strategies going forward. In that context I would like to assure you of WHO EMRO's commitment to this goal.

The WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, at its Sixtieth Session, reviewed as a special emergency item the alarming international spread of wild poliovirus in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, from December 2012 through October 2013. The Regional Committee was deeply concerned by confirmation of new poliomyelitis cases in the Syrian Arab Republic and in Iraq, as well as the previous evidence of renewed poliovirus circulation into Egypt and the occupied Palestinian territories identified through environmental surveillance. It declared the new international spread of wild poliovirus an emergency for all Member States of the Eastern Mediterranean Region. It urged all Member States to extend all possible support, including political advocacy and technical support, to the Syrian Arab Republic in their work to negotiate and establish access to those children who are currently not being reached with polio vaccination.

Dear Colleagues,

During your meeting you will make a full review of the outbreak in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, and the efforts being made by national authorities supported by polio partners. You will also hear about progress made in maintaining the status of 6 countries that have been polio-free for several years, and particularly those categorized as countries at high risk.

I look forward to receiving the recommendations of this meeting, particularly as they represent the joint views of experts and national responsible officers.

It remains for me to wish you a very productive meeting and a pleasant stay in Beirut.