Cairo, Egypt, 1 August 2019 — I have just returned from my third, and most fruitful and memorable visit to Pakistan as WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. The 4 days I spent in the country this week were truly effective and productive.

I had the chance to visit different areas in the country, including Larkana, where the current HIV outbreak has further aggravated already burdened health facilities in the impoverished area.

I held in-depth discussions with health officials, politicians, medical personnel, donors, partners and academics to learn more about health needs, foster partnerships and jointly advocate for
more resources. I saw strong political commitment to fighting diseases and placing high priority on health issues.

In my meeting with WHO staff in the main office and sub-offices, I saw how committed they are to saving lives, and I was very proud of their achievements and collective efforts to serve the people in Pakistan.

In Larkana, I visited Sheikh Zayed Hospital and Children's Hospital, which have admitted hundreds of children diagnosed with HIV and in need of urgent medical care, overwhelming the capacities of these facilities.

At the Children's Hospital, I met 8-month-old Mansoor who is suffering from malnutrition. His helpless mother was too feeble to look after the child, who was clearly in pain. It was apparent that people in this area, like Mansoor’s mother, suffer from severe financial hardship which makes it difficult for them hospitalize their children in time.
At the Children’s Hospital in Larkana, an 8-month-old Mansoor is suffering from malnutrition. His helpless mother was too feeble to look after the child who was clearly in pain. However, in the face of these serious challenges, I saw the dogged determination of health workers to continue serving people and overcome all difficulties.

I also met many unsung health heroes working tirelessly behind the scene to save lives in Pakistan. I was impressed by Dr Rafia Balooch’s devotion to others. Despite her retirement, she still makes frequent visits to Sheikh Zayed Hospital to offer assistance, using her long, reputable experience in gynaecology to serve women in need.
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I met Dr Abdul-Hakim, who has been working as a laboratory technician at Children Hospital in Larkana for more than 35 years. His expertise is now being used to help respond to the current HIV outbreak.
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These positive examples give me fervent hope that the health system in the country will overcome existing challenges and improve. I was even more hopeful after my meetings with the Special Assistant of Prime Minister on Health HE Dr Zafar Mirza and Provincial Minister of Health in Sindh HE Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho, where we discussed strategic plans to strengthen the health system and scale up interventions by WHO and partners.

I call upon all organizations, donors and stakeholders to stand by the people of Pakistan. Pakistanis deserve a better life. The agony I saw in the eyes of children and women makes me more determined to provide our maximum support. We have no other option but to act quickly and succeed.