It was an immense honour when the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (WHO/EMRO) welcomed me as its new Regional Director on 1 June 2018. On this occasion, I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to the members of the WHO Executive Board during its 143rd session in Geneva, Switzerland, for giving me an opportunity to propose my agenda for change towards a stronger and healthier Region (1). I look forward to my tenure as Regional Director, and have been impressed by the support displayed by WHO/EMRO staff, the WHO Executive Board, and public health bodies further afield.

As a family physician and specialist in quality healthcare provision and management, the pressures and challenges facing the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) resonate strongly with my desire to tackle these difficulties and see measurable improvement in the health of people in our Member States, and listen to their concerns. It is clear to all that the Region is
passing through a critical era, marked by natural and manmade crises that have led to
destruction of infrastructure and a deterioration in the health and living conditions of many
people, particularly displaced populations and refugees. Thus, every effort must be made and
all available resources mobilized to find appropriate solutions to these challenges.

As I take up the role of Regional Director, my immediate priority is to begin working with
countries in order to bring WHO closer to its Member States. No tangible change can be made if
we are far away from the areas where change is needed. The work and policies already
undertaken and approved by WHO have immense applicability to the needs of the EMR; in
particular the United Nation’s Sustainable Developmental Goal of Universal Health Coverage
(2), the International Health Regulations (2005) (3), and WHO’s Thirteenth General Programme
of Work 2019–2023 (4), which are among the key forces that I seek to promote in order to drive
interventions during my term as Regional Director.

Further to these key forces, I have identified four priority technical areas for my agenda, which
are: tackling health emergencies including disease outbreaks; improving control of
communicable and noncommunicable diseases and their risk factors; strengthening health
systems to achieve universal health coverage through a primary health care approach, with
special emphasis on family practice; and improving maternal and child health.

However, it is important to remember that tackling degradation in public health in the Region is a
collaborative effort. The Organization has a wealth of experience and expertise that has been
demonstrated over decades. Together in partnership with our other United Nations agencies,
developmental partners and nongovernmental organizations, no effort should be spared to
strengthen coordination and collaboration mechanisms to the benefit and efficiency of
operations in the Region. Ultimately my goal is to see WHO full of life, energy and enthusiasm. I
would like to see staff at different levels of this Organization working together as a strong,
productive team to provide the highest level of support to Member States, which turn to us for
assistance in the drive to improve the lives of ordinary citizens that have found themselves
desperate through no fault of their own.

I am immensely humbled by my selection as Regional Director, and look forward to working with
all WHO staff and our partners in our collective effort to raise the quality of public health in the
EMR. We are all aware of the steep challenges facing us, but I am confident after having
witnessed the dedication and experience of EMRO staff that we can together make a noticeable
difference to the lives of many.

References

