

Your Excellency Dr Faeqa Bint Saeed Alsaleh, Minister of Health,

Your Excellency Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid Alzayani, Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Acting United Nations Resident Coordinator Representative Dr Hashim Hussein,
WHO Director-General Dr Tedros,
WHO Representative to Bahrain Dr Tasnim Atatrah,
Distinguished attendees, colleagues and friends,

Thank you for joining us as we take this momentous step to further strengthen the long-standing relationship between the Kingdom of Bahrain and the World Health Organization.

I would like to extend special thanks to Her Excellency Dr Faeqa Bint Saeed Alsaleh for supporting and facilitating the opening of WHO's new country office.

Today, we commend Bahrain for your timely efforts to implement WHO recommendations related to managing this global pandemic.

Responding to COVID-19 has taught us 3 key lessons.

First, a successful response can only be achieved through a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. Here, let me acknowledge the steps taken by Bahrain to restructure the response to the pandemic to ensure a multisectoral approach, supported at the highest levels of government.

Second, success can only be achieved by fully engaging communities so that they are aware of the risks facing them and can themselves play a key role in preventing the spread of misinformation. Again, Bahrain has taken great strides in this area.

Third, success requires regional and global solidarity and collaboration. It is only by sharing lessons learned, experiences and resources that we can all come out of this pandemic stronger and better prepared for the next one. And Bahrain has a wealth of lessons to share.

We have all seen how the response to the pandemic has overstretched health systems, overwhelmed health workers and threatened the continuity of essential health services.

Bahrain has done excellent work to maintain the continuity of health care and ensure access to vital services in areas such as maternal and child health, mental health and other noncommunicable diseases.

WHO is committed to working with Bahrain to strengthen the provision of all essential health services, and a senior regional expert will be coming next month to work with our country office and national counterparts to focus on this critical area of work.

WHO also commends Bahrain's leadership in expanding public health interventions. Let me highlight just a few of the key milestones that you have achieved.

Your nursing programme is a model for the Region. You have led the way in integrating noncommunicable diseases into the primary health care system. And the recent designation of Manama as a Healthy City promises further progress in promoting population health.

These and other achievements have placed Bahrain on the regional and global map as an innovator and leader in public health.

The opening of this new WHO country office is a chance to build on those achievements. It will ensure deeper strategic collaboration between WHO, our esteemed national counterparts, our sister United Nations agencies and other partners. And it will also create opportunities for new partnerships and resource mobilization, especially in the Gulf sub-region.

Partnership for health is at the heart of WHO's vision of Health for All by All in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The Kingdom of Bahrain has been a key partner in the global and regional health arenas, and I am delighted that our partnership is now set to go even further.

In September, WHO will sign a landmark memorandum of understanding with Dr Khalid Alohalay, President of the Arabian Gulf University of Bahrain, to support the implementation of the WHO regional diploma programme in family medicine as an essential part of efforts to strengthen health systems and advance universal health coverage in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

This important project emphasizes WHO's commitment to strengthen cooperation with health sector stakeholders in Bahrain and other GCC countries.

I am confident that with our new country office plus the leadership of our WHO Representative, Dr Tasnim Atatrah, and the full support of all 3 levels of WHO, we will have an even greater positive impact on the health and well-being of people in Bahrain than ever before.

WHO will work on the ground with authorities, United Nations partners and other stakeholders in health, development and other sectors to foster public health collaboration at the national, regional and international levels.

I also look forward to seeing the many best practices and innovations that Bahrain has pioneered being adopted across the Region and beyond.

Let us use your experiences to help advance efforts in other countries. It is only by working together, learning from each other and supporting each other that we can eventually achieve our regional vision of a healthier future for all people, by all people.

Thank you.

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