



18 July 2021 - As we approach the Eid al-Adha feast, I would like to take this opportunity to wish all my brothers and sisters in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and beyond a blessed, safe, and healthy Eid.

Over the past 19 months, our lives have changed in ways we never could have imagined. As individuals, communities, countries, and as humanitarians, we have all been challenged. Our coping and response capacities have sometimes been stretched to the limit.

We are all well aware of the losses and sacrifices we have faced. But while we all continue to adapt to the new world we now live in and the limitations this pandemic has placed on our lives, I want to take this opportunity to talk about the future and the hope it brings.

COVID-19 has destroyed families, livelihoods, health systems, and economies. And like anything of value that has been destroyed, we are re-building. But we cannot rebuild through fragmented actions – we must work together for a more solid foundation, so that we are building back stronger and better.

Our hope for a better future is closer to becoming a reality through one of the most powerful tools that can help control COVID-19: vaccines. We are witnessing the largest global vaccination campaign in history. The more people vaccinated, the closer we are to ending this pandemic. The more people vaccinated now, the less chance we have for the virus to mutate and further circulate.

As we fight this pandemic, we are also working to build capacities for the future. Global

research and development into how the virus spreads and mutates, as well as vaccines and treatments for COVID-19 are advancing at impressive speed. Systems to detect and respond to current and new threats are being strengthened. Local production of vaccines has started in many countries, including in our Region.

This pandemic has not just been a lesson in science and public health – it has also been a lesson in humanity. We have all seen how one person’s actions can have resounding, catastrophic effects. We now need to focus on making sure that that our individual actions are for the greater good.

We have seen how health workers continue to put their own lives at risk to save the lives of others. Despite their own personal challenges, they remain dedicated and committed. We have seen people come together to make and distribute masks, deliver food and medicines to people who cannot leave their homes, and raise awareness on preventive measures in their own communities.

And we have seen many positive examples of regional and global solidarity by countries -- from donating funds for research and development, providing vaccines to COVAX, and delivering vaccines, medicines and supplies to lower-income countries. These acts of collaboration have made significant differences, especially for people living in war-torn parts of our Region.

This experience has shown us that only a greater sense of social responsibility, and global and regional solidarity can bring us out of this crisis. There is an end in sight, but we can only get there together, leaving no one behind.

During this Eid al-Adha feast, a feast associated with blessings and goodwill, let us pledge to each play our part to end this pandemic – from even the smallest to the biggest actions – and keep moving forward to a brighter and more hopeful future.

Peace be with you.

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