

His Excellency Mr Mamnoon Hussain, President of Pakistan, Her Excellency, Mrs Saira Afzal Tarar, Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination, Dr Zafar Mirza, Director of Department of Health Systems, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr Sana Hafeez, first ever WHO Global Champion on Assistive Technology being formally presented the letter of nomination14 May 2018, Islamabad – The opening ceremony of the first meeting in WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region on improving access to assistive technology was held on 8 May 2018 in Islamabad. The high-level meeting was attended by health professionals from 15 countries of the Region, senior officials from the Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination, Government of Pakistan, representatives of United Nations agencies, donors and dignitaries from the private sector.

The aims of the meeting were to:

- develop a regional framework on improving access to assistive technology; and
- highlight WHO's efforts in the Region to promote assistive technology, enabling people with functioning disabilities to lead healthy, productive, independent and dignified lives.
- generate efforts towards developing an evidence-based integrated policy to improve access to assistive technology for all as an essential component of health service delivery systems, supported by adequate financing.

Her Excellency, Mrs Saira Afzal Tarar, Federal Minister of Health, while addressing the gathering, said," This cause is very close to my heart and we have come a long way but there is still a lot to be done. Access to assistive technology is as important as having access to any other technology. Therefore to create an impact, one needs to have a good team. I thank all those who have supported the Ministry National Health Services Regulations and Coordination

and worked with us in this cause especially WHO in its untiring efforts in public health."

It was a great honour for WHO that His Excellency Mr Mamnoon Hussain, President of Pakistan, opened the inaugural session of the meeting. His Excellency, the President while addressing participants said, "I am pleased and feel proud that Pakistan has the honour of being the first country to organize this regional meeting on assistive technology and also has launched the list of Priority Assistive Products at the international level." All human beings on this earth are equally important and valuable. Therefore, people suffering from any kind of disability or weakness cannot be left behind on the mercy of fate. Thus, promotion and easy accessibility of assistive technology for their rehabilitation is the need of the hour. It is imperative for the progress and development of society that equal opportunities should be made available to all."

While expressing his appreciation for the convening of this important meeting, His Excellency Mr President Mamnoon Hussain, said, "This meeting, being held with the noble objective of bringing persons with disabilities into the mainstream of the society, is a welcome step. I warmly welcome the foreign delegates participating in this conference and hope that they will have the opportunity of exchanging ideas and experiences which will prove instrumental towards efforts being taken for this important cause. I am confident that as a result of this meeting some important decisions regarding rehabilitation of persons with disabilities would be taken. This will also result in opening of more avenues for development in the field of assistive technology in the Region." His Excellency said that the Government of Pakistan had taken numerous steps in this respect, including the Prime Minister's Health Insurance Programme and other welfare projects.

Assistive tchnology enables people with functioning difficulties to lead healthy and productive lives participating in education, the labour market and social life. To assist Member States to meet their commitments and realise related strategic actions at country level, WHO established the Global Cooperation on Assistive Technology (GATE).

Dr Sana Hafeez, designated as the first ever WHO Global Champion on Assistive Technology, was formally presented the letter of nomination from His Excellency Mr President Mamnoon Hussain. She has been honoured because of effectively raising awareness on the importance of improving access to assistive technology at global, regional and national levels.

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Factsheet on assistive technology

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