Before the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region an important goal to achieve by 2020, that is the elimination of blinding trachoma. Success in meeting that goal can rescue 10 million people suffering from active trachoma and around 80 million people living in endemic areas and in need for treatment from trachoma or its implications. Further more , elimination of trachoma can save around 3 Billion dollars the world loses every year due to the reduction of productivity of trachoma patients.

To eliminate trachoma, a lot of efforts need to be exerted and many health, economic and social conditions to be dealt with, as trachoma is a disease closely linked to poverty.

Since 1996K WHO and its interested partners from the Global Alliance for Elimination of Blinding Trachoma had held many activities to alleviate causes of blinding trachoma. In continuation to these activities, the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office holds a Regional Planning Workshop for the Elimination of Blinding Trachoma in Cairo, Egypt from 28-30 November 2005, gathering distinguished figures interested in Blind control for most among them are HRH Prince Ahmed Bin Abdel Aziz, the Head of Middle East IMPACT, HE Dr Tabita Boutros, Minister OF Health in Sudan and HE Dr Mohamed Awad Tag El-Din, Minister Of Health And Population in Egypt.

The Workshop aims at achieving the following objectives:

1. Review the current situation of blinding trachoma in EM Member States and activities for elimination of blinding trachoma under the Global initiatives of GET 2020 of Vision 2020;

2. Review the progress achieved by some Member States and the constraints faced by the countries in the field of elimination of blinding trachoma. (Based on country reports and data collection);

3. Coordinate and enhance the implementation of SAFE strategy in developing the national plan for elimination of blinding trachoma under GET 2020;

4. Establish technical cooperation between Member States in the field of elimination of blinding trachoma based on the regional experiences; and

Form a Regional partnership to ensure collaboration with all interested parties including international organizations, NGOs, development organizations and others interested in elimination of blinding trachoma

Trachoma is one of the oldest infectious diseases and a preventable cause of blindness. Blinding trachoma remains a public health problem in many countries in the world including Member States of the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Based on current information, WHO estimates that, globally, around 84 million people suffer from active trachoma, most of whom are children.

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, Trachoma is endemic in 12 countries namely Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Somalia and Yemen.

The improvement of socioeconomic conditions and the adoption of the SAFE strategy, which focuses on Surgery, Antibiotics, Facial cleanliness and Environmental change has decreased the prevalence of trachoma in many countries in this Region.

Still, many countries in the Region need to put elimination of trachoma high in their agenda so as to be able to achieve the goal and to catch up with other countries that went many steps forward in this direction such as Morocco who has announced a target date for elimination of blinding trachoma by 2005 and the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, where the prevalence of active trachoma has been reduced and efforts are now under way to eliminate blinding trachoma.

“In many of the countries of the Region trachoma is not a priority, but by alleviating poverty and linking trachoma to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) we can easily advance the process of blinding trachoma elimination” said Dr Hussein Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Office.

Many National. Regional and international organizations participate in the workshop including IAPB, IMPACT/EMR, UNICEF, AGFUND, The Carter Centre, the International Trachoma Initiative (ITI), Christoffel-Blindenmission (CBM), Sightsavers International, Al Noor Foundation, Al Bassar International Foundation, PICO and Al-Shifa

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