

On the eve of celebrating the World Sight Day, marked on 13 October 2011, the World Health Organization (WHO) urged Member States to provide support for the prevention of blindness, identifying the eye health and prevention of blindness as a priority area

According to the latest WHO estimates that the number of people with visual impairment (presenting vision) worldwide is 285 million, around 37 million people in the Eastern Mediterranean Region suffer from visual impairment due to eye disease or uncorrected refractive errors. Of these, 5.3 million people are blind with around 90% living in low-income countries.

World Sight Day (WSD) is an international day of awareness-raising, held annually to focus attention on the global issue of avoidable blindness and visual impairment. WHO marks this event in collaboration with the VISION2020-the right to sight, a global initiative launched in 2000 to eliminate the causes of avoidable blindness by the year 2020.

During the past 11 years, significant improvements have been made in advocacy, and in disease control for cataract and trachoma. However, there is a great deal left to do. Moreover, there are only nine more years remaining to eliminate the causes of avoidable blindness if we are to achieve the goal of the global initiative Vision 2020 – the Right to Sight.

The major causes of blindness are cataract, glaucoma, refractive errors, trachoma, and diabetic retinopathy. In countries like Egypt, these diseases demonstrate a serious public health problem resulting in the prevalence of avoidable blindness although Egypt has the necessary infrastructure and human resources for eye care

It is estimated that over 900 000 people are blind. The main cause of blindness is cataract, which can be easily operated upon in outpatient eye clinics.

This situation is identical in many countries where avoidable blindness and visual impairment are prevailing, although affordable interventions are available and can save millions of people from blindness and visual impairments. This requires urgent intervention and political will to eliminate the causes of avoidable blindness especially among children, young people and

people aged over 50 years.

In the context of celebrating WSD in EMRO, the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, in collaboration with National health authorities in Egypt and Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF), holds an event In Menoufia University, A delta governorate, in recognition of the great initiative of establishing the Lions Ashmoon Eye Centre, which aims at reducing avoidable blindness in the targeted rural poor population. It is a role example of collaboration between both public and private sectors along with Nongovernmental organizations; the Menoufia Governorate has donated the land in Ashmoon for establishing this Centre while the lions clubs funded the whole project and WHO Regional Office provided technical support to Lions in establishing the Lions Ashmoon Eye Centre.

Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) is a WHO partner and we are working together to support eye care activities and the childhood blindness project in Alexandria Eye hospital.

In order to support free cataract surgeries for low-income populations, we are pleased to announce that the Regional Office will provide 500 cataract kits to the Lions Eye Hospital in Ashmoon.

The Regional Office also in collaboration with the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) has developed the national plan for eye health and prevention of blindness. The main axes of this plan of action are forming a national committee for eye health and prevention of blindness under the leadership of the Ministry of Health. This committee should comprise representatives from universities, school health, NGOs, Ophthalmological Society, Lions, Rotary Clubs and WHO, approving, implementing and mobilizing resources for the national plan for eye health and prevention of blindness, establishing a functional unit for eye health care at MOH, integrating primary eye care and prevention of blindness and visual impairment within primary health care system; and strengthening public-private partnerships to improve eye care.

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