



Your Excellency, Minister of Health, Dr Hasan Al Gabbash;

Distinguished representatives of the Ministries of Education, Higher Education, Social Affairs and Labour, Information, and Interior;

Representatives of professional associations and syndicates;

UN sister agencies and international organizations; dear colleagues.

Today I am representing the WHO, but once upon a time I was an Ob/Gyn, having chosen that path after another woman, whom I admire till this moment: a professional who had passionately dedicated her life to saving lives of girls, women, precious lives of mothers, and their new-born children. I joined UNFPA after some years of clinical practice as engaging at strategic and population level meant one could save more lives at a given time through the right policies, strategies and plans to support interventions at different levels.

International community's actions then have been guided by the Millennium Development Goals and the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, where diverse views on human rights, population, SRH, gender equality and sustainable development merged into a remarkable global consensus that placed individual dignity and human rights as well as reproductive rights at the very centre of development. A more recent population conference was held in Nairobi 2021, that called for accelerated action for justice and development.

We have had successes to celebrate for the past decades. Between 2000-2019, maternal mortality has fallen by 38%. Today, more women give birth with the help of a skilled health worker. Annual infant deaths have declined from 8.7 million in 1990 to 4.0 million in 2018. The global under-5 mortality rate has halved.

But as you all know, we still face many significant challenges:

Every day, 810 women still die from preventable cases related to pregnancy and childbirth.

Cervical cancer affects over half a million women each year killing a quarter of a million.

Every day, there are more than one million new cases of curable STIs and those which are growing resistant to antimicrobials.

An estimated 1 in 5 girls, or 12 million a year, are married before their 18th birthday, undermining their health, education, safety and opportunities.

And 1 in 3 girls and women will experience physical or sexual violence during their lifetime.

These are only some of the challenges.

Predictably, the poorest, and most vulnerable groups are over-represented in these numbers. Women, girls and children in fragile, conflict and violence-affected situations are especially vulnerable.

The common factor that could improve the chances of health, and indeed survival, for millions is universal health coverage, access to essential health services, the targets set forth in the agenda of SDGs. The Global Action Plan on Health and Well-Being for All, launched at the UN General Assembly in September, brings together 12 multilateral agencies, including UNFPA, WHO, UNICEF represented here, to support countries in accelerating progress towards the SDG health targets.

Countries, including Syria, also align their national policies with the Sustainable Development Goals by committing to improving the health of women, children, and adolescents through multi-sectoral and multi-partnership interventions, reducing gender and equity gaps, and improving the quality of services.

Many things have been achieved to address the reproductive, maternal and child health in Syria. But, for all our progress, the milestones of which I spoke are a distant dream for millions of mothers and their children. And this is the source of discontent. The ongoing 11-year crisis has profoundly impacted the health of women and children; too many are still dying because of lack of access to quality health care, resources, and information. I must also mention declining socio-economic situation that impacts health through indirect determinants, power to give warmth, clean water, sanitation, access to diagnostics and treatment, out-of-pocket expenditures.

I would like to commend the collective efforts and commitment for formulating the strategy to address these ongoing challenges. The adoption of the National Strategy on Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal, Child and Adolescent Health for 2022 – 2025 developed by the Ministry of Health in close partnership with WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA was guided by the Global Strategy on Women's and Children's Health for 2016-2030 that focuses on survival, growth, and transformation. The National Strategy breathes new life and is one important milestone in achieving health for mothers & children; & achieving health for all.

As WHO, we have been there from the first day of the Strategy conceptualization, situation analysis and development and we stand committed in its steady implementation through operational planning with indicators' framework, and costing. We have been supporting the reproductive, maternal, and children's health in many ways and determined to continue. These include some of the most recent work, such as:

Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses programme through 540 health centres that received over 1 million child patient visits in a year.

Nutrition surveillance through 968 health centres that provided over 1 million services and detected 20 000 cases of malnutrition.

Nineteen (19) stabilization centres that treated over 1500 complicated cases of malnutrition.

Infant and young child feeding programme in 761 health centres, providing more than 285 000

services.

Neonatal resuscitation programme in 38 hospitals that offered different interventions to prevent asphyxia in more than 70 000 deliveries.

Youth-friendly centres that provided over 25 000 services.

Newborn care-at-home programme that conducted 20 000 home visits to detect risk signs in pregnant women and newborns and referred them, when needed, to special care.

Capacity of reproductive health professionals built through specialized training courses to 630 midwives.

Development and distribution of reproductive guidelines and awareness-raising materials on pre-marital testing, sexually transmitted infections and family planning.

WHO remains firmly committed to supporting Syria in implementation of the strategy, and we are hopeful that this strategy will contribute to ensuring all women's, new-borns,' children's and adolescents' equitable access to comprehensive, integrated, high-quality, effective, and sustainable health services in Syria. More will need to be done as we move forward, for operationalization of the strategy and setting indicators' framework, costing and financing its implementation.

I know from my own experience that more can be achieved when we work together within the government sectors, national and international organizations, and the whole society - we all can contribute to the implementation of the strategy, so that mothers can experience safe childbirth, babies are born healthy and develop to their fullest potential from birth to their adolescence and adult life.

Once again, I congratulate the Ministry of Health for launching this milestone Strategy and wish

the Ministry and other health partners success in its implementation.

Thursday 9th of May 2024 05:17:04 PM