

WHO, since its establishment more than six decades ago, has celebrated World Health Day every year. This period has witnessed key improvements in the control of diseases by antimicrobials. The scientific success achieved in the control of communicable and chronic diseases through optimal therapeutic management is considered a victory for health promotion initiatives, and the realization of WHO's vision of assuring effective drugs for those who need – them for all diseases – in order to reduce the risk of microorganisms to individual and community health.

However, we are seeing now a decline in the cure rates of diseases due to the development by all kinds of microorganisms – bacteria, viruses and parasites – of resistance against drugs, which results in a weakening of the response of antimicrobials and, consequently, reduction in their effect. This threatens to return the world to the era before the discovery of the medicines that are so essential in controlling infectious diseases, the heavy burden of which needs to be addressed urgently. The importance of this issue has led WHO to mark World Health Day 2011 with the theme: “Combat drug resistance”.

WHO and its partners from the countries of the Region have a responsibility to support the scientific progress made in medicines manufacturing technology through adopting best practices to minimize the risk of antimicrobial resistance. The effective use of medicines is promoted by following a sound scientific process that ensures that medicines are manufactured according to quality standards, are rationally prescribed through accurate diagnosis and are only dispensed based on a confirmed medical prescription. The correct application of scientific standards must be accompanied by awareness and support from local communities in all countries, besides the role of scientific and civil institutions and the individual's responsibility in the cautious and careful use of medicines.

This year, celebration of World Health Day comes at a time when some countries in the Region have witnessed and are witnessing great changes represented in the national movements calling for freedoms. The violent confrontations and victims on all sides that have accompanied these events make it necessary for us, besides continuing our efforts to combat drug resistance, to mobilize capacities to address the current challenges, meet the health needs of the countries affected by the violence exerted against civilians and continue to work to ensure the right to health for all without discrimination based on religion, race or political affiliation.

In this regard, WHO is supporting the relief efforts with its partner agencies in the United Nations and the national authorities in the affected countries, and has provided supplies of

medicines and equipment as well as technical support to medical and first-aid teams in the field. These efforts have been carried out despite the great challenges hindering the work of medical teams in some countries and threatening the safety and lives of their members, together with the lives of other civilians. These challenges also threaten the health gains achieved in these countries, including the health facilities and systems which are exposed to damage and which may cease to function and to provide health services to those who are most in need.

WHO is rising to its responsibility in fulfilment of its mandate, provided for in the WHO Constitution, and supported by other international laws, conventions and agreements.

Humanity has made great strides through history towards health improvement and health development and it is unacceptable for any group or person to endanger these achievements or misuse them, or to undermine the right to health and life.

Let us use the celebration of World Health Day 2011 to ensure that we deserve these achievements and are capable of protecting them for humanity always.

May God bless the people and our countries.

Peace be upon you!

Dr Hussein A. Gezairy, Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean

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