



*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

**Message from**

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**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO FOR EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**on the occasion of**

**WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY 2010**

**24 March 2010**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, the 24th of March, let us all take the opportunity of this World TB Day to remind ourselves that the disease of tuberculosis, or TB, is still among us. In this age of scientific advancement and technology, we have yet to eradicate a completely curable disease like tuberculosis. This is indeed tragic and a great concern for every one of us.

Tuberculosis is a global epidemic. It is present in every corner of the world. Every day, 5000 people die of this disease. It is even becoming more dangerous and difficult to control because of the emergence of drug-resistant forms, called multi-drug resistant, or MDR tuberculosis. Every year, 511 000 people in the world develop MDR tuberculosis which is much more expensive and more difficult to treat than ordinary tuberculosis. What makes us yet more worried is another, deadlier form of drug-resistant tuberculosis, known as XDR tuberculosis, which is virtually incurable. Both resistant forms of the disease are outcomes of the failure to control tuberculosis in time.

Tuberculosis has not been eliminated in the countries of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region. Every year, more than 110 000 people die unnecessarily from the disease in this region. And, as elsewhere in the world, multi-drug resistant tuberculosis is also increasing in the Region. Indeed, when we look at the suffering caused by tuberculosis and its resistant forms, it emerges as an important health and development challenge in the Region. The enormity of this challenge does not belie the efforts made by the national tuberculosis programmes in the Region. Thousands of patients have recovered and are now leading happy

lives thanks to the tireless efforts of the national programmes and their partners. Nevertheless, more than 800 000 people have tuberculosis in our countries and need our prompt attention and help.

World TB Day, held every year on 24<sup>th</sup> of March, exists to remind us that we should not let this situation continue. But the Day is not just to remember TB. It is also to renew our commitment and efforts. Getting everyone together, pooling our resources and putting up a joint fight that can be sustained are the purpose of the Day. I am sure you will agree that this can only be done when governments are conscious of their responsibility to provide quality tuberculosis care and control services; when the media is ever ready to spread awareness; when civil society lends a ready hand in supporting people with tuberculosis, their families and carers; when the private health sector contributes to detecting more cases; and when the business sector contributes towards the financial needs of the tuberculosis care mechanisms in the countries. This is a huge task but not an impossible one if we all work in partnership, in coalitions and in groups, sharing expertise and resources.

Last year, more than 1.8 million young people across the Region—from the villages of Afghanistan to the historic cities of Morocco—marched on World TB Day under the banner of the Million Youth March. This year, “innovation to accelerate action” is the theme of World TB Day. Around the Region, countries will be marking the Day in line with the global theme of innovation, with music, under the slogan "*Together, singing the song of Stop TB*". The campaign, facilitated by the Regional Office and supported by the Eastern Mediterranean Partnership to Stop TB, is intended to be different from the seminars and conferences that usually mark such an event, and the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean has invited countries to write their own songs.

Music has a very strong inherent ability to bring people together. It can appeal to the positive roles of working on and with tuberculosis, acknowledging the people who are saving patients' lives, those who have recovered from tuberculosis and are leading new lives, and those still under treatment. Music can elicit commitment to defeat tuberculosis in a way that no other medium or activity can, and can reach out to people who have never yet been involved, to say “Yes we support Stop TB”.

Let's all be part of this campaign and sing the song of the Stop TB movement.

Thank you.