



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from

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WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

on the occasion of

**WHO REGIONAL TRAINING WORKSHOP ON REGULATION OF HERBAL
MEDICINES**

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Your Excellency, Distinguished Participants, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express my gratitude to the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting this regional training workshop on the regulation of herbal medicines and to Your Excellency (name and title depending on who from the MOH&ME will address the meeting; confirmation not yet received) for honouring the meeting with your kind presence.

Your Excellency, it is no coincidence that we have chosen your country to be the venue for this training workshop; the main purpose of which is the development of a suitable mechanism for regional harmonization of regulatory requirement of herbal

medicines. The Islamic Republic of Iran not only has a long tradition in the use of herbal medicines but is an acknowledged centre for academic thinking as well as industrial development in this important area which, after many years is seeing a well deserved revival both in our region and the world at large.

Traditional Medicine was, is, and will continue to be an important component of health care provision around the globe and in our region. In fact, we can be proud about the fact that Unani medicine, or Arabic medicine, is one of the most well-known and popular traditional medicine systems. Governments and patients alike are increasingly finding a place for the use of traditional medicine or natural medicine therapies among their options in health care. It can be noted on the one hand that, as one-third of the world's population lack regular access to essential drugs, a large proportion of the population in developing countries, indeed up to 80% of people in some rural areas, relies on traditional medicine as its primary, often sole, source of medication. In the industrialized world, on the other hand, an increasingly large proportion of the population, in recognition of western medicine's limitations, turns to traditional or alternative medicine as a complementary form of medicine. The latter phenomenon can also be observed in those Member States of our region which are more fortunate in terms of their overall level of socio-economic development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This does not mean that there are no problems threatening the future of Traditional Medicine. Common problems in most countries globally and regionally include the following:

Traditional medicine and its practitioners have not been officially recognized by many national health care provision systems and therefore continue to function outside these systems;

Regulation and registration for herbal products and other traditional therapies, based on scientifically sound safety and efficacy criteria has either not been established or is not enforced in most countries;

Research, education and training in traditional medicine have not received due attention by Governments and Academic Institutions alike;

Focusing specifically on the area of regulation it can be noted that there is sub-optimal cooperation and information-sharing regarding market control between the ministries of health and or national regulatory authorities of our region. Necessary data related to safety, efficacy and quality control is often missing and national authorities may not have the expertise to evaluate the safety, efficacy and quality of herbal products. Furthermore, most countries of the region either lack an national safety monitoring system or the existing system excludes herbal medicines.

This first of two regional workshops on regulation of herbal medicines focuses on controlling safety, quality and efficacy through regulation and standards governing registration, production and distribution processes.

I consider this workshop a unique opportunity for those member states of our region that are primarily producers of herbal medicines and the repositories of traditional medicinal knowledge to come together to share their experiences in the development and implementation of national regulatory policies and to develop a common understanding leading to regional harmonization in regulation of and policy on herbal medicines. It is therefore that I consider the planned document on common goals and principles in the regulation of herbal medicines to be the main product of this workshop.

Dear colleagues,

I assure you that WHO continues to attach great importance to the proper regulation and appropriate use of herbal medicines as reflected in the following objectives of the our regional programme:

- support countries in integrating herbal medicines into their national drug policies where appropriate which includes developing systems such as registration and inspection to ensure their quality;

- promote the proper use of herbal medicines by providing technical guidelines, standards and methodologies;
- facilitate relevant information exchange among Member States.

WHO will, where necessary, continue to provide the required leadership in the collection and collation of the necessary evidence base and the setting of norms required for a meaningful and complementary use of Traditional Medicine as an equal partner to Modern Medicine. Wherever Traditional Medicine presents useful opportunities of enhancing health care, and in many cases it does, we will support its integration into, or at least co-existence with, the prevailing health care model.

I am particularly pleased to be able to inform you today that the Ministers of Health of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, during the Regional Committee held earlier this year, recognized the important role Traditional Medicine and its practitioners continue to play in ensuring the health of their populations. They also noted the major challenges in the field of Traditional Medicine including the need for more sound evidence concerning their safety, efficacy and quality as well as the growing need to protect and preserve Traditional Medicine knowledge and natural resources. They furthermore adopted a resolution calling for all Member States in our region to implement the WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002-2005 as a framework for the development of national traditional medicine programmes and in particular to develop and implement national policies and regulations on Traditional and Complementary/Alternative Medicine in order to support its proper use. Your work

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