

**Dr. A. T. Shousha Foundation Prize for 2016
Awarding Ceremony, Cairo, October 3, 2016
Laureat address
Walid Ammar MD, Ph.D**

Excellencies Ministers of Health
Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General
Dr. Alaa Alwan, Regional Director
Honorable delegates,

It is a great honor and privilege to be awarded the Shousha Foundation Prize. I would like to seize this opportunity to highlight some regional and country perspectives related to my recent contribution at both levels.

Our region has been witnessing, for years now, an unprecedented escalation of violence and massive displacement of people, adding to the preexisting precarious economic and health situations in many countries. More than ever, people's health and destiny are entirely in the hands of the region political leaders. Nevertheless, health officials are still needed to alleviate suffering, and on this, I would like to commend the efforts of our regional and country offices under the leadership on Dr. Alwan, as well as the health ministers and their teams, in facing the tremendous health challenges, while we hope for more wisdom at the political level.

In this context, our Eastern Mediterranean Region had to be present and active in different WHO fora to stand up for our values and influence WHO policies for the benefit of our populations.

I had the honor, as a member of WHO Executive Board, to represent our region in the Working Group on Strategic Budget Space Allocation, where I had the opportunity to introduce "political instability" as one core indicator for needs assessment. This was a significant achievement that brought some balance in budget allocation in the favor of our region.

On another front, epidemic threats to global health security are increasing and most of our countries are still not well prepared to face them, which constitutes a major concern for our region. The collapse of health systems in 3 west-african countries, facing the recent Ebola epidemic, has put global security at considerable risk. Henceforth, health system resilience is considered as a global public good.

The Ebola outbreak aroused a wave of severe criticism to WHO with the usual insinuation that an alternative is needed. I had the honor to be member of the “Advisory Group on the Reform of the WHO’s Work in Emergencies”. The Group advised for the creation of a single emergency programme with its own budget and workforce and one set of business processes. The purpose is allowing WHO to position itself as an operational organization in humanitarian emergencies in addition to its leadership in technical expertise. The Advisory Group report came in line with our position to preserve the decentralized structure of WHO, by respecting the prerogatives of the regional director and most importantly empowering country offices. I appreciate the support of Dr. Alaa Alwan and Dr. Jawad Mahjour in pushing forward our region’s agenda. I will be also vigilant about the implementation and proper operation of the program, in my current capacity as a member of the “Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee”.

With respect to Lebanon, and despite political crises, economic austerity, military conflicts and massive influx of refugees, the health sector did not loose ground. Studies reveal that over the last 2 decades, the health status of the population has been improving steadily and significantly while decreasing considerably the GDP share of health expenditures, mostly as a result of a meaningful reduction in households out-of-pocket spendings.

If I should attribute progress to one single characteristic of the health system, I would say: innovative governance. The most difficult leadership is that of getting things done by a multitude of stakeholders with different agenda, interests, and beliefs. The Lebanese society is plural and diverse by its different confessions and political groups, a strong private for profit sector and an active civil society with powerful NGOs. Considering the very limited resources and weak authority of the public sector, the challenge is how to make all these partners work together to achieve national health goals. The answer is to find a non-hierarchical governance structure, that replaces control and command leadership, by a collaborative leadership to achieve common goals through an open networking type of governance.

Therefore, I would like to share this honor today with people who collaborated with the Ministry of Health to make progress. These are health professionals working in different institutional settings, guided by science, professional ethics and human values. Those actors in public and private sectors, despite the depressing political climate and unfavorable working conditions, are contributing to alleviate pain, reduce morbidity and mortality, improve quality of life and promote social progress.

Allow me also to pay tribute to my family, particularly my wife May for her support and involvement in this endeavor.

Finally, I would like to thank Minister Wael Abou Faour for proposing my name, the Shousha Foundation Committee and the Executive Board for honoring me with this prestigious award.

Thank you.