

Speaker: Dr. Akjemal Magtymova Head of Mission and WHO Representative in Syria.

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Event: Global Seminar and the Launch of the Report of the WHO Global Meeting to Accelerate Progress on SDG target 3.4 on Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health.

Dr Tedros, Your Excellency Dr Ahmed Al Saidi, Dr Al Mandhari:  
Excellencies, Distinguished colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I had the honor of being part of the 2019 Global Meeting as WHO Representative to the Sultanate of Oman, being closely involved in the preparations and proceedings, together with the teams of WHO HQ/EMRO, WHO Country Office and the Government, Ministry of Health of the Sultanate of Oman. A little over a year later, I am overjoyed to join you, my friends, and colleagues, to celebrate this true landmark event.

I would like to commend the Sultanate of Oman for their commitment and progressive work on NCDs and mental health, especially throughout the last year, that required re-orientation of services, new modalities of service provision and attention to the overall wellbeing.

The year 2020 has been incredibly challenging for the humanity, for all of us- global public health community, redirecting our efforts towards the battle of our lives: fighting pandemic and maintaining critical public health functions at the same time. “Redirecting our efforts” for me personally meant to be in the forefront of the WHO operations as times demanded, moving to serve as the WHO Representative to the Syrian Arab Republic.

In its 10th year of armed conflict, Syria represents another spectrum of countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, with huge humanitarian needs, especially for those who are internally displaced. With fewer than 3 beds available per 10,000 population and only half of health facilities fully functioning, it made it almost impossible to face the challenges of the COVID-19. For Syrian people, economic impact brought even deeper devastation adversely affecting their lives, access to medicines and services, putting people living with chronic NCDs at the extreme needs and exacerbating psychosocial and mental health

problems. This where WHO steps in as a provider of last resort, I have witnessed the member states in the Region and across the globe stepping in for solidarity and support.

Dear colleagues,

Today we are in a new era, and while the fight against the pandemic is not over, the countries with varied socio-economic levels and political climates are increasingly recognizing the prevention and management of NCDs is especially vital in the context of COVID-19.

The year 2020 made us learn many lessons and what I witness and what gives me the determination to serve are the people who continue to demonstrate colossal courage and resilience.

We are stronger together in our mission to save lives.

Wishing to you all productive deliberations and a successful year ahead.