OPENING SPEECH – WISH OCT 2024

PROFESSOR THE LORD ARA DARZI

Your Highness, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

As-salamu’alaykum

Welcome to WISH 2024.

It is terrific to be here together in Doha again for this, the seventh WISH summit.

It is testament to the deep and lasting relationships that have been created at WISH and sustained over the past decade.

Through the turbulence of the past ten years, WISH has endured.

Even the global pandemic could not stop our work from continuing—in fact it underlined how our challenges are shared.

It was the energy and vision of Her Highness Sheikh Moza bint Nasser that brought us together in the first place – and it is her continuing passion that sustains WISH now.

WISH is made possible by the unwavering support of Her Excellency Sheika Hind bint Hamad Al Thani, CEO of Qatar Foundation.

The leaders of health reform and creators of innovation have once again come together from around the world to share ideas, celebrate successes and shape our collective future.

We last met in Doha just before the FIFA World Cup.

Sport brings joy and is a powerful force for unity when so many are trying to pull us apart.

The tournament was a resounding success.

It was praised for being extremely safe and family friendly, for the high quality of the football, and for a nail-biting final game.

And in a region that has known so much tragedy, the World Cup was more than a tournament – it was – and continues to be – a beacon of hope.

Never has hope been more needed than it is today.

Once again, the region is in turmoil with the war spreading from Gaza to Lebanon and the wider region.

People are suffering beyond imagination and beyond words.

War is a healthcare catastrophe.

There can never be any justification for targeting healthcare personnel or healthcare infrastructure. It is purely and simply wrong and must be condemned.

I want to pay tribute to all the healthcare workers who have been killed and injured – and to all of those who continue the struggle to provide medical care in the most appalling conditions.

The theme of this year’s WISH is “Humanising Health: Conflict, Equity and Resilience”

These themes will be discussed by our distinguished panel of speakers, including – in a moment - Christos Christou, international president of Medecins Sans Frontier.

I also want to pay tribute to His Highness the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, and the whole of his government, for their tireless efforts to bring about a ceasefire and lasting peace.

Qatar is a leading diplomatic force in the region not only because of the persistence of its efforts but because of the power of its example.

Through investment and reform, Qatar’s health system has gone from strength to strength.

Yesterday, Her Excellency Dr Hannan al Kuwari stepped down as Minister of Health.
I would like to take a moment to thank Dr Hannan for her enormous contribution to healthcare in Qatar and around the world.

Her compassionate, calm and far-sighted leadership has inspired us all.
And she has left the Qatar’s health system far stronger than she found it.

[PAUSE]

I also want to take this moment to warmly welcome Dr Hanan’s successor, His Excellency Mansoor bin Ebrahim, Al Mahmoud.

I have no doubt that under his leadership, the Qatar health system will continue to embrace innovation and improvement and advance on its journey to be one of the world’s top health systems.

Indeed, I want to pay tribute to the work of the whole Ministry of Health, Hamad Medical Corporation, Sidra Medicine, and the Primary Care Corporation under the leadership of Dr Mariam Abdul Malik.

Now, some of you may know that I recently led an investigation into the performance of the National Health Service in England.

I concluded that it was in critical condition, even though its vital signs were strong.

Ten years ago, I think it is fair to say that I felt there was much that Qatar could learn from the NHS.

Ten years on, today, it is apparent that there is far more the NHS can learn from Qatar and the success of its reforms.

Over recent years it has expanded its network of primary healthcare centres, implemented the WHO’s “Healthy Cities” concept nationwide and rolled out electronic health records to streamline patient information.

It reaped the benefits of this approach during the Covid-19 pandemic by mounting a response that resulted in one of the lowest mortality rates globally.

Qatar’s success in managing Covid is the subject of one of our policy reports.

I commend it to you as a model of how to deal with the next pandemic – in particular, its commitment to science-based decision making, which is vital for all countries everywhere.

Our policy reports always cover the most pressing health topics.

This year they include:
• humanising health - by improving the relationships among health and care workers and the people they care for
• improving women’s health – by boosting cancer prevention and detection in the Eastern Mediterranean
• using innovative approaches to reduce infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, in refugee populations
• and new approaches to boost palliative care – an under-resourced but vital area of health care.

I want to draw your attention to our report on antimicrobial resistance – and not only because I am a joint author of it with Professor Dame Sally Davies.

More than a decade ago we produced the first WISH report on the need for radical action to tackle the growth of antimicrobial resistance.

I have now made tackling antimicrobial resistance my biggest priority.

And I am honored to chair the Fleming Initiative, which aims to build a global movement to protect humanity from this growing threat.

We have raised 130 million dollars towards our goal, which includes building a network across the world.

Our recent WISH report sets out six recommendations, beginning with the implementation of September’s UN declaration to establish an independent body to drive action on antimicrobial resistance.

We also call on all high income countries to commit by 2027 to prescribe antibiotics ONLY when the need is confirmed by a diagnostic test.

These are critical moves if the world is to protect itself against what has been described as a “slow pandemic”.

But the real importance of this report is that it reminds us of our common humanity and our common vulnerability.

It demonstrates both the power and the limitations of science.

We need science to make progress. But we must also harness public support, develop policy, improve regulation, enhance communication and marshal all available forces to improve our world.

That depends on us, the WISH community.

The vision of WISH is to build a healthier world through global collaboration.

This has been WISH’s mission from the start – to bring people together to develop, promote and disseminate innovations that can transform our world.

I would also like to pay tribute to Sultana Afdhal, who has been WISH’s CEO for over 8 years and is now stepping. It is fantastic how WISH has grown and developed under her leadership and I wish her well for the future.

And I welcome our new CEO Dr. Slim Salma who brings extensive experience from the World Health Organisation. I know WISH will continue to flourish under his guidance.

I look forward to our discussions over the next two days and the opportunity they provide to strengthen the bonds between us.

We can show the world how, in place of discord and division, collaboration and co-operation can help us meet and overcome the challenges we face.

Enlightened and encouraged by what we have learnt, we can then take forward the messages from WISH and build a global movement for a better world.

Thank you.

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