

Foreword

I am extremely delighted to present the foreword to the Book of Proceedings of the 9th Regional Congress of the Medical Women's International Association (MWIA), Near East and African Region (NEAR), which took place at the International Conference Centre, Abuja, Nigeria, from 24th to 27th March 2021.

This is the second time Nigeria is hosting the event, the first being in 2000. Just like the Book of Proceedings of the Second Congress, it is hoped that this Book of Proceedings of the Ninth Congress will be used to archive the highlights of the event as well as provide an advocacy tool for the attainment of health and health-related Sustainable Development Goals in the region.

The theme of the Congress was Accelerating Universal Health Coverage: Priorities, Opportunities and Challenges.

The objectives of the Congress were:

1. To assess the status of implementation of strategies for attainment of Universal Health Coverage in the NEAR, sharing experiences and identifying challenges/ constraints and proffering practical solutions
2. To explore strategies for moving from rhetoric to concrete actions for accelerating achievement of Universal Health Coverage, including necessary changes in institutional mechanisms in the region
3. To present and discuss most recent advances, innovations, constraints/challenges encountered and practical solutions towards provision of Universal Health Coverage across the region
4. To identify and agree on strategies for strengthening healthcare systems, especially at primary healthcare level, reducing inequities and providing people-centred quality essential healthcare services
5. To present and discuss new knowledge, skills, opportunities and gaps in strategies for attaining Universal Health Coverage by 2030 and the effect on women, children, adolescent/young people, the elderly including those living in emergency and difficult circumstances and other vulnerable groups
6. To strengthen key stakeholders' commitment and secure political agreements that promote Universal Health Coverage for all people in the NEAR
7. To build mutually collaborative partnerships, alliances and coalitions that advance Universal Health Coverage in the context of Sustainable Development Goals.

To improve the health indices of nations in the region, priority must be given to instituting an efficient monitoring and evaluation system that involves all players in the health sector using objectively verifiable indicators. Second, we must identify health workers who are doing well and motivate them financially while sanctioning appropriately those who persist in doing badly.

While still struggling to achieve Universal Health Coverage as indicated in the Sustainable Development Goals, the NEAR experienced along with the rest of the world the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, health workers, governments and non-governmental organisations have been resilient in mitigating the impact of the pandemic and have found various opportunities to strengthen their health systems during this pandemic. We are now on the road to recovery as vaccine roll out is commencing across the region as we hope the pandemic is in its last throes. We could no longer wait for everything to return to normal after postponing the Congress from the original date in September 2020 but had to convert the programme to a hybrid event featuring virtual and physical components, after months of planning this historic activity.

We are indebted to several partners and donors namely UNFPA, dRPC, Pfizer, Delta State Government, Kaduna State Government, National Health Insurance Scheme, National Primary Health Care Development Agency, Jhpaiego, Africa Centre for Disease Control, our Medical Women in Leadership Positions and our Medical Women behind the Congress for their material and financial support that contributed to the success of the events.

I wish to appreciate Dr Eleanor Nwadinobi, MWIA International President, Prof Padmini Murthy, MWIA Secretary-General, Dr Helen Goodyear, MWIA Treasurer, Dr Christine Sadia, MWIA NEAR Regional Vice-President, Prof Bettina Pfleiderer, MWIA Immediate Past President, Prof Afua Hesse, MWIA Past President and several other officials of MWIA for their immense contributions to making this Congress a great success.

Many thanks also go to all session chairs, rapporteurs, presenters and delegates for the stimulating scientific sessions.

Sincere appreciation goes to Prof Oludayisi Oduntan, the Founder and first Convener of MWAN who I am sure is very proud of how MWAN has grown since 1977.

My gratitude goes to the Chair of the MWAN Board of Trustees (BOT), Prof Oyin Elebute and other members of the BOT for their oversight and support.

To our amazing Chair of the Congress Planning Committee, Dr Claribel Abam, Administrator par excellence and the entire members of the Committee, I congratulate you for a job well done.

Dr. Mininim Oseji
National President,
MWAN