

## **Calls to Increase Health Budget and Make Vaccines Available for Millions of Children**

Al Ghad (Amman) by Hasan Shoubaki  
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The scientist Dr. Ciro de Quadros, Executive Vice President of the Sabin Vaccine Institute in Washington, D.C., recently recalled his experience of 20 years ago, when he created a fund in Latin America to cover the cost of essential vaccines for all children, regardless of their families' ability to pay. After seeing success in Latin American countries, Dr. de Quadros, who is in Amman today, is working to re-launch the idea again—in the Arab world this time. He believes that the same strategy that brought success in Latin America could work effectively in the Arab world. Specifically, rich Arab countries could support a vaccination fund, while raising awareness of health issues, especially for child immunization, and decreasing child mortality.

“Arab countries could succeed in this area, since rich Arab countries are in a better economic situation than Latin American countries. However, the core issue here is to change our priorities in order to achieve greater immunization rates, better health outcomes and fewer overall deaths,” said Dr. de Quadros.

Yesterday, Dr. de Quadros, along with other Arab paediatricians and Jordanian specialists, launched a “Call of Action.” According to Dr. de Quadros, action is needed to “find new mechanisms, through funds supported by rich Arab countries, to help other Arab countries who can't afford to vaccinate their children, in order to achieve equity in distributing vaccines and health care for children.”

The cost of this effort is not unfathomable and prices would likely decrease with time, as prices fall down 50 or 60 percent when vaccines are purchased in bulk.

Arab pediatricians, participating at the conference, criticised the “low expenditure of Arab countries on health issues and child care. While they spend trillions on arms, even they are not participating in any wars, and more and more, they are ignoring children immunization needs year after year. It is life that is threatened as a result.”

Evidence of the poor state of vaccination programs in the Arab world, women and men in the Gulf region are spending more than two billion a year on cosmetics.

“The need for serious investment in vaccines is apparent. Vaccines are not a luxury or a right of affluence. New vaccines that can prevent pneumonia and meningitis are not given in most Arab countries, but are the right of all,” said Dr. Najwa Khuri-Bulos, Chair of Union of Arab Pediatricians Infectious Disease Committee, and Pediatrics Professor at the Jordan University Hospital.

Explaining the importance of vaccination issues, Dr. Khuri added, “14,000 Arab children a year receive a prognosis of meningitis. Half of them die, while 30 percent of the survivors are disabled. Vaccines that can prevent pneumonia and meningitis are not available for approximately half of Arab children, which means that, in Arab countries, child mortality is unnecessarily high,” Dr. Khuri explained.

To solve this problem, about nine million children in the Arab world need new vaccines to protect them from these diseases. According to specialists and Dr. Khuri, “health and immunization of those children remains contingent on achieving the political will to cooperate and finance new vaccines in all Arab countries.”