

SPEECH BY PROF. IHSAN DOGRAMACI FOR AWARDS AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 12<sup>TH</sup>  
WORLD CONGRESS ON PUBLIC HEALTH (Istanbul, April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009)

President Buss, of the World Federation of Public Health Associations,  
My dear friend, Excellency Abdul Rahman Al-Awadi, Founder and President of the Islamic  
Organization of Medical Sciences,  
Monsieur Marc Danzon,  
Distinguished guests,

It is a singular privilege for me to receive the awards just bestowed on me.

I am deeply grateful to the Federation for singling me out as the first recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award of Excellence in Global Health. I shall always cherish the memory of this occasion and the significance of being the inaugural laureate.

I am equally honored to receive the award of the Islamic Organization of Medical Sciences from my dear friend Al-Awadi. It seems as if I have known him all my life, and I will always treasure the memory of this unexpected gesture.

Ladies and gentlemen, in my long life of 94 years I have been fortunate enough to receive many awards of different types. Each one made me happy and proud. In my opinion, the source of an award holds special meaning. Certainly two types stand out with compelling force.

First, awards given by sovereign states and their governments. As you have just heard, it was my good fortune to receive such an award two years ago from Turkey's Grand National Assembly by its unanimous vote, and another one two months ago from the National Parliament of Egypt. I had also been the proud recipient, in 1998, of a special award for "peace, justice and tolerance" conferred by the Council of Europe - and many honors and citations from a number of countries through the years.

Ladies and gentlemen, the other highly important type of award comes in the field of health. That is the field in which I started out as a pediatrician some 70 years ago. The health of children, youth and all humanity has a vital importance and an incomparable value in my heart, and I have received the Léon Bernard Foundation Medal from WHO, the Christopherson Award from the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Maurice Pate Award from UNICEF. In 1997 I received the WHO Health-for-All Gold Medal. I treasure them all, and I am truly delighted to receive two awards here today, one representing the world's public health associations and the other the Islamic medical world.

Our legendary Ottoman-Turkish emperor of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, who was also a conqueror of the poetic art and the author of nearly three thousand poems, placed health above all else. One of his couplets is in common parlance as a Turkish proverb:

"The people think of wealth and power as the greatest fate,  
But in this world, a spell of good health is the best state."

Three centuries later the great American literary figure Ralph Waldo Emerson echoed our "emperor of justice and good health" by expressing an identical sentiment. Emerson asserted:

"The first wealth is health."

In fact, ladies and gentlemen, health in modern times is hailed as the essence of our physical being in a spirit of metaphysics as well. The prominent Vietnamese poet Thich Nhat Hanh once observed:

"Keeping your body healthy is an expression of gratitude to the whole cosmos - the trees,  
the clouds, everything."

Health care that serves the world's public is the ultimate and superlative virtue. The World Federation of Public Health Associations, and the Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences, both reflect that virtue.

I thank you for bestowing on me these awards, and I thank the distinguished guests for joining us at this ceremony, which is a highlight in my lifetime.