

Preface

The Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) are a group of 17 viral, bacterial, protozoan, and helminth infections that disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations. The concept of NTDs began to take shape following the 2000 Millennium Development Goals put forth by the United Nations, specifically Goal # 6 to combat HIV/AIDs, malaria, and other diseases. Although the “other diseases” category spurred substantial debate, it is now accepted that the 17 diseases classified as NTDs by the World Health Organization (WHO) represent some of this “other” category. Compared to HIV/AIDs, malaria, and tuberculosis at 42.1 %, NTDs have generally been ignored (i.e., neglected), receiving only 0.6 % of official assistance for health (Liese and Schubert 2009). These diseases do not cause substantial global mortality; however, morbidity can rival HIV/AIDs and malaria (Murray et al. 2012; Vos et al. 2012). Importantly, NTDs are some of the most common diseases on the globe, thrive in impoverished regions, and perpetuate the cycle of poverty, causing mental impairment in children and hindering socioeconomic development.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is highly endemic for several NTDs. This region is economically diverse, encompassing both oil-rich and resource-poor nations. 340 million people live in the region, of which 12 % (~50 million) live on less than \$2 per day (World Bank 2010). While global efforts to eliminate some NTDs have been successful in MENA countries, many have not received such attention. Soil-transmitted helminth infections are the most prevalent NTDs in the MENA; however, modifications in human behavior, recent environmental changes, and political turmoil have increased the risk for many others. The present volume, *Neglected Tropical Diseases in the Middle East and North Africa*, covers the most prevalent NTDs in the MENA region, including chapters on dengue virus, rabies, brucellosis, leprosy, trachoma, toxoplasmosis, cutaneous and visceral leishmaniasis, fascioliasis, schistosomiasis, and soil-transmitted helminth infections. The authors of individual chapters are experts in their respective fields, either MENA-endemic scientists or non-endemic researchers with an intimate knowledge of these diseases in the MENA region. This book emphasizes disease burden, clinical manifestation, and current control approaches and outlines the major obstacles for

reducing the burden of NTDs in the MENA. In most cases, social determinants, including human migration, political instability, urbanization, and agricultural practices, are all drivers in preventing control of these devastating diseases. In particular, the recent political landscape in the region has had devastating impacts on public health management leading to a breakdown in control efforts and an increase in outbreaks. Increased surveillance efforts, including advanced training, improved diagnosis methods, and mandatory reporting, are needed for most of the NTDs in the region. Successful strategies to combat the burden of NTDs will undoubtedly require strong political commitment and intimate international collaboration involving research, policy, and veterinary and human health implementation sectors.

The hope is that this volume will stimulate increased awareness and commitment from research institutions, funding agencies, and governments to eliminating the devastation caused by NTDs in the MENA region. Ultimately, we desire strengthened cooperative efforts of all the MENA nations for controlling the burden of NTDs and international commitment to stabilize the political situation in the region.

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It is with our deepest regret that one author, Professor Rashida Barakat, passed from this world before this project came to fruition. Her contribution to this volume and her tireless efforts towards schistosomiasis control in Egypt will be forever remembered. It is to this distinguished scholar and mentor that we dedicate this book.

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