

Address by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah
Opening the
IOF World Congress on Osteoporosis
May 11, 2002

This year's World Congress brings together a remarkable gathering of leaders in the osteoporosis field. That achievement is a tribute to the IOF and the respect it has earned – as a force in global policy, healthcare education and medical innovation. I'd like to specially thank and congratulate Professor Pierre Delmas, the Congress organizing Committee, the IOF board, and the IOF Secretariat for the impressive work they are doing. And let me also take this opportunity to thank our Portuguese hosts for their generous hospitality.

My friends,

Together in the room are the people who are changing the future of osteoporosis all over the world. Thanks to your leadership, commitment and professional expertise, millions of people will have better, healthier lives.

You are the backbone of what has become a global movement. But I don't simply mean that you keep it standing strong.

After all, when you think of what a backbone does, you remember that it is the conduit for the spinal cord, carrying messages to and from every part of the body. In just the same way, every one of you is a conduit for vital information and ideas to and from the countries and people of the world.

This morning, I would like to suggest two messages that I hope you will carry home when you leave your meetings here today. The first is simple. It is our goal, and our reason for being here. Strong bones build strong lives, and strong lives build strong futures, for individuals and nationals alike. We must do all we can to make that strength a reality for all.

Because, make no mistake about it, what can be accomplished here is tremendously important. The fight against osteoporosis is a fight to liberate millions of people, the majority of them women, from a disease that profoundly restricts life's opportunities. In younger people, osteoporosis can impede daily activities and prevent productive work. In older adults, it can take away the chance for independent living. The costs of associated healthcare and hospitalizations impose huge personal and social burdens. We know, too, that osteoporosis can result in complications that ultimately lead to death.

As we enter the 21st Century it is predicted that demographic changes will only increase the incidence of this disease – first in the industrialized world and then in developing nations – nations that can least afford this health challenge.

So what can we do? We can act - urgently, promptly, and with the power of many.

That leads me to the second message I hope you will carry with you from these meetings, and that is: the force-multiplying effect of working together.

The history of medical progress is a history of great partnerships: patients and doctors – researchers and clinicians – public and private initiatives. Today, these partnerships will be absolutely essential if we are to meet the challenge of osteoporosis.

We will look to healthcare professionals and scientists – like so many of you – for research breakthroughs as well as health services. Many also have an important public policy role. They donate their time to work with osteoporosis patient societies. They help produce important publications, such as the European Community Audit Report, published last December, that provided key information showing that in too many countries, access to diagnosis and proven therapies is only available after a person has broken a bone!

Help will also come from patients and their advocates. Today, 139 national societies from 71 countries are members of IOF. It is they who generate public awareness, change legislation, mobilize financial support, and educate the community. Advocacy like this is critical if we are to make an impact. Today, patients and potential patients – and that means all of us – must give a voice to our concerns. It starts with making sure that we – and our daughters – focus on the things we can do to prevent osteoporosis: diet, exercise, and understanding the health of our bones. It continues when we help our doctors become aware of our needs and problems. And we are the ones who will help schools, NGOs, and governments understand how important this issue is.

Back home in Jordan, for example, the Jordanian Osteoporosis Prevention Society, a member of IOF, has undertaken nationwide outreach for public awareness. JOPS has organized conferences for doctors, and sponsored lectures and media campaigns aimed at the general public. Perhaps most important, it has helped set up programs in our schools – targeting young people in their critical, bone-building years.

Worldwide, IOF's goal is to ensure that healthcare systems provide diagnosis and treatment for people with osteoporosis before the first fracture. Governments will continue to play a central role by developing strong healthcare policies – from insurance reimbursement, to healthcare education, to making osteoporosis a priority in national and international forums.

Government also faces the need to pay for care, within its ability to do so. To extend their reach, we will need to turn to the private sector. It cannot be right that some medicines cost more in Africa than they do in some parts of the United States. A new partnership between the developing world and industry can make the fruits of research and development available to many more of those who need it.

As we move forward, we will also depend on help from many friends – friends in the media and advertising world who can publicize the problems and solutions, opinion-

makers who can help make osteoporosis a global priority, scientists who can see that osteoporosis research receives the attention and funding it deserves, and those who underwrite the vital work of IOF and national patient societies.

In fact, when you think about the army of people whose help is needed, our task may seem daunting. But every one of these groups and individuals is already at work. Together we have scored tremendous successes. Today, global awareness of osteoporosis has increased dramatically. We have significant new diagnostic tools and better access to them. There are a growing number of effective treatment options and exciting research is underway. In the years ahead, with your help, we can bring new hope to millions of people.

I hope you are as proud as I am to take part in this effort. I urge you to take advantage of all this Congress has to offer, and leave these meetings with new and positive energy. Because all of us, together, can make a powerful difference, a healing difference, in the days to come. And that's a message we should all be proud to carry throughout the world.

Thank you very much.

