

Dr. Lujain Alqodmani, the Immediate Past President of the World Medical Association (2023-2024)

Interview: Chieko Kurihara, Kotone Matsuyama, Varvara Baroutsou

Message from the President for peace, health and human rights

Dr. Lujain Alqodmani who served as the President of the World Medical Association (WMA) for the term 2023 to 2024 accepted our interview just before the adoption of the Declaration of Helsinki (DoH) at the General Assembly (GA) plenary session on October 19. Her last speech as the President at the Council session on October 18 was truly impressive. She started her speech from the episode when she was in the United Nation and her husband was caring her daughter Yasmin, who also played an important role at the GA in Helsinki to give us message that the world leader can accomplish her simultaneous pursuit of responsibility as a mother.

In her final message as the WMA President, she called for peace for the sake of health, for the sake of rights, for the dignity of all people, and for the enjoyment of equal capacity-building opportunities. Let us work together to call for peace and to identify the key determinants of health, to set priorities, to reflect the voices of those who cannot speak, and to ensure that medical research contributes to improving health not only through individual research participation, but also to the realization of equitable global health, including realization of women's rights around the world.



Dr. Lujain Alqodmani's last speech as the President of the WMA, at the Council session on October 18. Photo: ©WMA



Before the formal ceremonial dinner, talk between Presidents of the WMA and IFAPP, with WMA President's daughter, Yasmin.



Interview with Dr. Lujain Alqodmani, just before the adoption of the revised DoH on October 19.

DoH as a symbol of global collaboration

She stated that the Declaration of Helsinki is a symbol of our determination to act together, a symbol of shared commitment and unity toward the highest ethical standards, discussed and agreed among the stakeholders from a number of regions including conflict-affected countries. She was very much proud and honorable with the achievement through the exciting process of extensive discussions in regional meetings. The workgroup achieved a marvelous job. The inputs and the reflections of the diversity of the WMA is fantastic and it was valuable to integrate the expertise and feedback received from partners, including IFAPP. Adoption at the GA is just a starting point. The next step is implementation, dissemination, communication. This was also the key topic of the last session of the last regional meeting in Washington, DC, where Dr. Alqodmani was a moderator and Kurihara was a panelist.

The DoH is not a document only for physicians but it is a document for all healthcare professionals or researchers and for patients, so we have great collaboration now with alliance of patient organizations. We wish to explain to the patients what are their rights.

Tackle with the inhuman situations

During our interview, Dr. Alqodmani also spoke about the need to tackle with the inhuman situations taking place in the world. Since she was inaugurated as the President of the WMA October 2023, throughout her presidency, there has been immense danger in health care all over the world. We are now seeing devastative situations of tremendous attacks against the healthcare facilities and other complex situations of violating humanitarian laws. In Ukraine, unfortunately, in Sudan, in Gaza, and now in Lebanon.

And not just during conflicts, but also in many other disaster situations. There are heartbreaking, tragic incidents are emerging that the doctors face, although they have to be assured safe working environments. Like the incident of the rape and killing of Indian junior doctor that happened in India and many doctors are now taking streets, demanding for a safe working environment.

Doctors' moral duty for SDGs

There is our moral duty. Despite the fact that we are nearing the end of 2024 and only five years away from fulfilling "sustainable development goals" (SDGs), including the universal health coverage. We are still left behind. We are still lacking a very strong political power. Commitment from our government to really prioritize health is needed. The health of the people and the rights of the professionals that provide health care must be at the top of their political agenda.

Support for the realization of women's rights

Dr. Alqodmani is the fifth woman President of the WMA, representing the Kuwait Medical Association. In Kuwait, women have the right to vote, to be members of the parliament. There have been women who are ministers of health, directors of hospitals, CEOs and other privileged positions at organizations. But never had a woman who has been the president of the Kuwait Medical Association. There's still so much work to be done to ensure to create the right support structure and the leadership avenue for women. Structures to support vulnerable people including women would be necessary, considering each situation. Maternity leave for women residents is one month. The doctors have to go back to work, leaving her child behind. There are many other challenges, but great progress has been seen compared to some other countries.

As a Global Leader

She is engaged in medical service as an emergency physician in Kuwait, holding vital roles such as the co-chair of the WMA Environment Caucus and International Relations Director at Kuwait Medical Association, also having influential positions at Women in Global Health and the International Federation of Medical Students' Association, where she represented the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

The duties of the WMA President were handed over to the incoming President at the GA on October 19. Interviewers expressed our hope that IFAPP will continue to collaborate with the Past President by creating opportunities to learn from her marvelous rich experience.