

61st session of the WHO Regional Committee inaugurated in Tunisia

In his opening speech before the 61st session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, inaugurated yesterday evening in Tunisia, Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, said that WHO is currently facing an unprecedented situation as it responds to five high-level Grade 3 emergencies around the world, two of which are in the Region.

Dr Alwan highlighted the humanitarian crises in Syria and Iraq, which have been graded at this highest level of emergency, as well as the emergencies in Gaza, Libya and Yemen, and noted that “in particular, The world’s public health capacity to detect, adjust and respond to emerging health threats needs to be considerably strengthened.”

During the opening of a rather special session due to current and potential health threats and consequences, Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General, indicated that this is not an easy time for countries in WHO’s six regions. “Conflict. Senseless violence. Natural and man-made disasters. A changing climate. Antimicrobials failing are but some of the challenges the world is passing through,” Dr Chan said. “Continuing sporadic cases in this region of MERS. noncommunicable diseases claiming lives way too young. And never far away, the constant threat from emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases.” Talking about ebola, Dr Chan said that ebola will get far worse before it gets better:

The opening session of the meeting was inaugurated by H.E. Dr Tawfiq Aj-jlassi, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, on behalf of H.E. Mehdi Jomaa; Prime Minister of

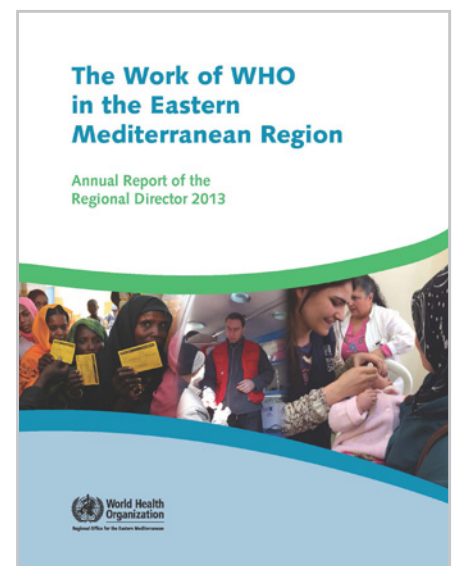


The opening session was held in Tunisia yesterday

Tunisia who reiterated that the right to health cannot be ensured without collective efforts specially under the current difficult circumstances. In his opening remarks, H.E. Professor Mohamed El Saleh Ben Ammar, Minister of Health of Tunisia praised the role of WHO in pushing forward the health agenda in the Region resulting in improved health indicators in many areas such as communicable diseases, as well as reductions in child mortality rates and increased capacity-building of health workers. H.E. Professor Ben Ammar also reiterated the importance of coordinated regional efforts to improve the health of affected populations in Palestine, especially in Gaza, as well as in Syria and Iraq.

Annual Report of The Regional Director: New Initiatives. New Approaches

Members of the Regional Committee will review the Annual Report of the Regional Director, which highlights the collaborative work of WHO’s Regional Office and Member States during 2013. “It is clear that many of the Region’s health challenges would be well served by stronger health advocacy, health diplomacy and constructive social and political debate. An increasing number of the health challenges we are seeing can no longer be resolved at the technical level only – they require political negotiations and solutions, at global, bilateral and national level,” noted the Regional Director in the introduction of the report. The Annual Report focuses on the major work undertaken in regard to the strategic priorities endorsed by the Regional Committee in 2012: health systems strengthening towards universal health coverage; maternal and child health; noncommunicable diseases; communicable diseases, particularly health security; and emergency preparedness and response, as well as WHO management and reform.



Improving Operational Planning to Avoid Fragmentation

Improving operational planning with Member States for collaborative work is another item on the agenda of the Regional Committee. The 2016–2017 biennium, will focus on improving operational planning to avoid fragmentation, identifying key priorities related to country needs where WHO can make a real difference, ensuring quality in the prioritization exercise and linking human resources strictly to the priorities identified.



More People Living With HIV Have Access For Treatment

The Regional Committee will review the Regional strategy for health sector response to HIV 2011–2015. There has been progress in the Region: the number of people living with HIV (PLHIV) receiving life-saving antiretroviral therapy (ART) increased between 2011 and 2013, faster than in previous years and reaching 39,101 by the end of 2013



Shaping The Future of Health in The Region: Mid-Term Report

The Regional Committee will review a mid-term progress report on the paper titled Shaping the Future of Health in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region: Reinforcing the Role of WHO 2012-2016. WHO aims to make a difference in the Eastern Mediterranean Region by 2016 in five key areas that will lay the foundation for continued positive development in health: health systems strengthening for universal health coverage; maternal and child health; communicable diseases; noncommunicable diseases; and emergency preparedness and response, in addition to WHO management reforms.



Photos from the RC

Emergencies: Preparedness and Response

The Regional Committee will address the area of emergency preparedness and response. 13 out of 22 countries in the Region are experiencing emergencies, affecting a total of more than 58 million people. However, the level of emergency preparedness and the capacity for crisis response and recovery remains low, especially with regard to the health sector.



International Health Regulations to Ensure Global Health Security

There are increasing possibilities of the global spread of outbreak-prone diseases and for the accidental or deliberate release of biological, chemical, radiological and nuclear agents. The importance of collective action to manage international health emergencies has been recognized. The International Health Regulations (2005) provide the legal framework for collective responsibility in ensuring global health security. This depends on the quality of national public health systems. This will be the subject of a technical discussion during the meeting.

MPOWER Averts Millions of Deaths

As one of the main noncommunicable disease risk factors, the subject of tobacco is being addressed during the 61st RC. A study commissioned by WHO of the impact of adopting six proven tobacco control measures (MPOWER) in 14 countries in the Region shows that cigarette smoking prevalence rates can be substantially reduced if the complete set of measures are implemented to the highest possible level of achievement recommended by WHO. This translates into millions of averted deaths due to cigarette smoking over the coming decades.



WHO press conference on Ebola: Expert teams reach countries to enhance preparedness



The press conference on Ebola

A press conference on Ebola was held yesterday on the sidelines of the Pre-RC technical discussions. Dr Margret Chan, WHO Director-General and Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, briefed the media on the current situation and efforts taken globally to contain the outbreak.

Dr Chan and Dr Alwan stressed the following:

- The fact that the Ebola virus has reached developed countries such as the United States and Spain indicates that it can be circulated through travel despite the high level of preparedness by these countries.
- Many countries have asked for WHO's direct support in assessing their level of preparedness and scaling up their readiness measures;
- WHO will be deploying a team of experts to Morocco within 24 hours and to Tunisia in the coming days to assess levels of preparedness and guide the countries to step up necessary measures where gaps are identified. WHO will also support countries in training, laboratory diagnosis, risk communication and infection control measures.

Down Syndrome Prize: Revision of Evaluation Process

Following the recommendation of the Down Syndrome Foundation Committee at its tenth meeting, held during the 60th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, the Foundation Committee recommended revision of the process of evaluation of nomination and proposed changes will be shared with the members of the committee for endorsement at its meeting during the 61st Session. The Committee also recommended that a call for nominations be sent out in 2014 to be awarded in 2015.

PANEL DISCUSSION ON NONCOMMUNICABLE DISEASES

On the first day of the Regional Committee, a panel discussion on noncommunicable diseases will be held, moderated by Mrs Laila Shaikhli, the renowned TV anchor. The panel will include representatives of the Ministers of Health, WHO, NGOs and other concerned partners.

The panel discussion aims to highlight the importance of the issue of communicable diseases and the efforts taken so far by all parties to promote prevention methods and address the threat of NCD prevalence in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.



Useful Documents For Rc Participants

WHO will share with the Regional Committee (RC) participants documents highlighting the achievements and challenges in regard to: polio eradication, tobacco control, health-related Millennium Development Goals and health targets after 2015, regional strategy for health sector response to HIV 2011–2015, saving the lives of mothers and children, and shaping the future of health in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region.