

Message from

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WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

on the occasion of

WORLD HEALTH DAY

“OUR PLANET, OUR HEALTH”

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World Health Day 2022 focuses on the theme Our Planet, Our Health.

It is impossible to have a healthy society in a polluted environment, or to have a clean environment in an unhealthy society. The global COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted just how interconnected and vulnerable our world has become – and how sick.

Environmental risks including climate change are responsible for 23% of the total burden of disease in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and as much as 30% of the disease burden for children. An estimated 1 million people die prematurely every year in our Region as a result of living and working in unhealthy environments.

Environmental hazards such as polluted air, toxic chemicals and lack of access to water and sanitation exacerbate the Region’s inherent vulnerability to infectious disease outbreaks, epidemics and pandemics, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. There is growing evidence of a direct connection between environmental change and the emergence or transmission of COVID-19, while on the other hand the pandemic has diverted resources from development efforts and placed additional stresses on ecosystems and health systems.

To tackle these challenges, we need to address the root causes of ill health. Many aspects of environmental health go far beyond the health sector, so concerted action by many different actors across different sectors is required, focusing on upstream interventions to prevent, minimize or mitigate environmental risks.

Recovery from COVID-19 presents a historic opportunity to rebuild better and create cleaner, healthier and fairer systems and societies. With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we have a clear path towards a “win-win” scenario that protects health, climate and the environment. And tackling environmental risks is also an essential part of WHO’s vision of Health for All by All in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

WHO has classified climate change as the biggest threat facing humanity today, and we are working in our Region and globally to deal with this and other environmental threats. I am pleased to report that 11 countries from our Region committed to develop climate-resilient and sustainable health systems at the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow last year, and we will advocate for more countries to join this major initiative during the coming COP27 in Egypt.

But we all need to do so much more. On this World Health Day, I call on everyone – governments, businesses, health professionals, civil society, communities and individuals – to protect Our Planet and Our Health.