



Beirut, 18 April 2023: The World Health Organization (WHO) in Lebanon has today celebrated its 75th anniversary and World Health Day, as a beacon of hope, resilience and progress in advancing the country's public health and humanitarian efforts.

To mark the occasion, WHO held a ceremony at the UNESCO Palace in Beirut under the patronage and in the presence of Dr Firass Abiad, the Minister of Public Health, Dr Abdinasir Abubakar, the WHO Representative in Lebanon, Mr Imran Riza, the United Nations Resident Coordinator, Mr Andreas Kindl, the German Ambassador, and a remarkable number of official and diplomatic figures.

The ceremony started with a short documentary on the history of WHO since the establishment of its presence in Lebanon. The documentary focused on the most important events involving the Organization during the crises of the years before the civil war, through the war and its aftermath, and up to the present day, covering the different emergencies and epidemics.

In a pre-recorded speech for World Health Day (7 April), Prime Minister Najib Mikati said:

“We thank WHO for its constant support for health issues in Lebanon and its tireless support through its continuous cooperation with the Ministry of Public Health. We are confident that the national strategy for the health sector that we launched at the beginning of the year will contribute to the restructuring of the health system to become more equitable, integrated and effective for universal access to high-quality health care focused on individuals.”

In his opening speech at the event, Dr Abubakar welcomed the attendees and dignitaries and described the WHO's efforts and most significant achievements as a major player in the field of global health over the decades, saying that:

“WHO and its partners are working together on multiple fronts to achieve scientific and field programmes that will change the face of the world today. Only joint and continuous efforts will enable us to achieve Health for All and renew motivation towards achieving health justice. Along with expressing our commitment to improving the health and

well-being of the people of Lebanon, we would like to express our gratitude for the unwavering support from our partners, including the government, the Ministry of Public Health, United Nations agencies, nongovernmental organizations and donors, and remain committed to working together for a healthier and more resilient Lebanon.”

In his remarks, Ambassador Kindl said:

“WHO has increased life expectancy and quality of life, improved access to clean water and sanitation, reduced malaria, tuberculosis and polio successfully, fought Ebola and COVID-19 and so much more. There is no country that did not at some point in its history depend on the support and knowledge of WHO. Lebanon is no exception and did profit enormously during the most recent cholera outbreak and when WHO helped provide access to services and protection from COVID-19. While facing new and old crises, WHO remains committed to contributing to the UN Agenda 2030 and particularly to Sustainable Development Goals 3: Health and well-being for all. As we come together on World Health Day, the Health for All promise remains unfulfilled and much needs to be done to meet the 2030 agenda and to leave no one behind.”

In his comments, Minister Abyad said:

“Here we are, 75 years after the establishment of WHO, celebrating World Health Day and Health for All as a basic human right. But there are still enormous challenges facing securing Health for All. The eruption of crises locally and globally limits the resources available to the health sector and enables the spread of epidemics, making it difficult to prepare for them. And the limited primary care services in low-income countries help increase the number of people with noncommunicable diseases, which increases the burden on the health sector and consumes the country’s resources. These problems are exacerbated by climate change and its negative impact on health institutions. All of this does not help achieve equality in health provision or achieve Health for All.”

Mr Riza, UN Resident Coordinator in Lebanon, stated that:

“Health is at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals, and is an intrinsic element of any development. Health for All highlights the UN’s commitment to equity. Universal health coverage is a common global goal that all UN agencies and global partners are investing social, economic and environmental resources in to reach by the year 2030.”



During the ceremony, WHO nominated Professor Jacques Mokhbat as this year's "Health Champion" to amplify WHO's 75th anniversary campaign, which is running from 1 January 2023 to 7 April 2024.

Dr Mokhbat is a well-known academic and trusted public health expert who has represented Lebanon on several WHO committees at the regional and global levels. He has never hesitated to donate his time and expertise to support the Ministry of Public Health in addressing significant outbreaks of communicable diseases in the country. He is a well-known public figure, always ready to provide the media with health information during emergencies.

Since its establishment in Lebanon in 1951, WHO has been at the forefront of health promotion, disease prevention and emergency response in the country, including during the current challenges. WHO actively supports the national health response to prevent, detect and respond to health threats and provides technical guidance and vital medical supplies to Lebanon. By adopting a comprehensive One Health approach, WHO will continue to build more robust health systems, promote health justice and respond quickly and effectively to health emergencies.

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