

Eastern Mediterranean health news

Palestinian health development

The Declaration of Principles on the arrangements for transitional self-rule, including transfer of authority and responsibilities in the field of health, was signed in Washington on 13 September 1993. Under this Declaration authority in various fields, including health, will be transferred to Palestinians with a view to promoting economic development in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as soon as implementation of the Declaration is initiated.

During the transitional stage, the outlines of Palestinian health policy are expressed in a number of essential principles, namely: health is a basic human right; it is a social goal and an integral part of development; it is the right as well as the duty of individuals and groups to participate in the planning and implementation of health care services. The existing discrepancies in the health condition of Palestinians should be minimized. The Palestinian health authorities are responsible for the protection of the health of the citizens; for ensuring that the health plan is in line with the HFA/2000 strategy; and that primary health care is the means of attaining this target. Health legislation should be established in accordance with this strategy, ensuring the exercise of control over medical, paramedical and pharmaceutical professions and practices.

In this context, a collaborative health programme has been formulated by the recently established Palestinian Health Authority and the World Health Organization's Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office. WHO collaborative activities during the biennium 1994-1995 are directed towards providing technical support for improving and promoting existing health programmes, tak-

ing into account the Palestinian health plan and the action plan for the transitional period. WHO support will focus on situation analysis, policy formulation and technical support for priority programmes.

WHO will also support the efforts made by the health authority for the development of health systems based on Primary Health Care through promoting the health information system, epidemiological surveillance and the managerial process for Palestinian health development.

Reference: Joint Programme Review Mission Report, Palestine WPD. 10/25, 23 October 1994, WHO/EMRO.

Week of tranquillity to vaccinate Afghan children

Millions of children in Afghanistan have been vaccinated against polio and measles in a week of tranquillity (19-26 November 1994) with a complete cessation of hostilities. The aim was to enable vaccination teams and health centres to provide their services and immunize children after the large-scale disruption of immunization services during long years of war.

This week of tranquillity was only the first stage in a concerted campaign incorporating these stages with the aim of vaccinating Afghan children under five years of age against childhood diseases. The campaign also provided vaccination for women who are pregnant or of reproductive age against neonatal tetanus. The target was set by WHO for this first stage was to immunize 30% of Afghan children against polio and measles. The second and third stages are planned to achieve

coverage against all childhood diseases targeted by the Expanded Programme on Immunization.

It has been possible to arrange this period of tranquillity through the strenuous efforts of WHO through its Representative's Office in Afghanistan and its Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean to secure binding commitments from all parties who are active on the Afghan stage.

Reference: Press Release, EMRO, 24 November 1994.

Dr Hussein A. Gezairy warmly welcomed in Afghanistan

In a five-day official visit to Afghanistan, Dr Hussein A. Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean received a cordial welcome from the national leaders and health officials in the eastern, western and northern zones of the country. Upon his arrival on 8 December 1994, Dr Gezairy was met at Jalalabad airport by H.E. Dr Sayed Mohammed Amin Fatimie, Minister of Public Health.

The Minister briefed the Regional Director and the accompanying delegation about the unprecedented mass immunization campaign that took place from 19 to 26 November 1994. During this week, not only were thousands of children vaccinated against the deadly diseases of childhood but also thousands of warriors were saved during the ceasefire from death and handicap. The Minister appreciated the special role played by Dr Gezairy and WHO in the successful planning and implementation of the campaign. The Regional Director praised the successful campaign in which WHO worked closely with the Ministry of Public Health and stressed that vaccination programmes should be kept ongoing in the country. The guests then visited the IIRO orphanage and the Kabul Medical Institute which was able to maintain its academic functions despite the current situation. At the

end of the first part of the visit, the Regional Director was received by Haji Abdul Qadir, Governor of Nangarhar Province and Chairman of the Council of Eastern Provinces.

The second leg of the trip took Dr Gezairy and his companions to Herat airport in the western zone of the country, where he was met by Hajr Mir, the Governor of Herat, and other senior officials. The Delegation visited Gozarah clinic, Sia-Oshan clinic and Herat hospital. Deep concern was expressed with regard to the problem of tuberculosis and cholera in the area. The successful vaccination campaign in the western zone was mentioned with appreciation. Officials were preparing for the second and third rounds of the campaign and intend to combine vaccination with distribution of vitamin A and iodine capsules, along with health education about iodized salt and breast-feeding. Dr Gezairy expressed full support for such orientation. His visit to the Western Province concluded with a meeting with General Ismail Khan, Chairman of the Western Zone of Afghanistan.

On 11 December 1994, Dr Gezairy and the accompanying team landed at the Mazar airport. In this capital city of the north zone, the delegation visited an MCH Centre and a public health complex. Dr Gezairy met with General Abdul Rashid Dustum, leader of the National Islamic Movement, and other high political and community leaders. The Regional Director praised the collaborative efforts made in the north zone by the authorities concerned and the community in support of the successful immunization campaign and other vital health areas, and expressed his commitment to spare no effort to help health development in this area and in Afghanistan at large.

Health agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Sudan

H.E. Dr Alireza Marandi, the Minister of Health and Medical Education of the Islamic

Republic of Iran accompanied by a high official delegation visited Sudan from 14 to 18 December 1994. They held detailed discussions on health matters of joint interest to the two countries, particularly health delivery systems achievements, obstacles and goals, training of health human resources, as well as on the exchange of expertise and information. The Federal Ministry of Health of the Sudan agreed to hasten the process of registering Iranian pharmaceuticals so that collaboration in this important area could be promoted.

An action plan was signed by H.E. Dr Alireza Marandi of Iran and H.E. Galwak Deng Gareng, the Federal Minister of Health, Sudan, on 18 December 1994 in Khartoum. *Reference: Report by the WHO Representative in Sudan, January 1995.*

WHO collaboration with Pakistan towards Health for All by the Year 2000

Pakistan is among 22 Member States of WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region that are together endeavouring to achieve the global target of Health for All by the Year 2000.

Towards that end, Dr Hussein A. Gezairy, Regional Director for WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region visited Pakistan during December 1994 where he was received by H.E. Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan. He also held detailed discussions with Dr Yasin Baluch, Parliamentary Secretary for Health, Federal Secretary of Health, Director-General of Health, and Begum Sharmaz Wazin Ali, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for the Social Sector.

In a statement made by Dr Gezairy before he left Pakistan, he said that his discussions with the national authorities focused on health and health related issues, mainly the following:

1. the Prime Minister's Programme for Family Planning and Primary Health Care

2. the Expanded Programme on Immunization
3. local production of vaccine
4. HIV/AIDS and safe blood transfusion
5. elimination/eradication of diseases such as leprosy and dracunculiasis.

In addition to the above main programme areas, the sphere of discussions covered also other important issues, such as:

1. improvement of the quality of life of the people of Pakistan through meeting their Basic Minimum Needs
2. leadership development in health
3. the national tuberculosis programme
4. environmental health, including community water supply, sewerage and Healthy Cities.

The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office pledged to maintain its close collaboration with the Government of Pakistan towards the achievement of the goal of Health for All by the Year 2000.

Reference: Report from the WHO Representative in Pakistan, January 1995.

WHO calls on policy-makers to reduce women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS

In September 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development, in its meeting in Cairo, Egypt, reached a consensus on the need to make reproductive health services fully available to women as an integral part of Primary Health Care.

Following this conference, 42 governments convened in Paris on 1 December 1994 upon an invitation from WHO and France, where they signed the Paris Declaration to support initiatives to empower women and reduce their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

Another link in the global mobilization required to reduce women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is an International Consultation

held in Geneva from 6 to 8 February 1995 to develop strategies and actions to reduce women's growing vulnerability. The participants were more than 50 top-level policy makers, mainly women members of parliaments, and representatives of people with AIDS, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, ministries and other UN agencies.

The consultation, organized by WHO, was held to prepare for the Fourth World Conference on Women, to take place in Beijing, China, in September 1995.

Reference: Press Release WHO/II of 8 February 1995.

Incidence of acute flaccid paralysis and poliomyelitis

The reported incidence of cases of acute flaccid paralysis and poliomyelitis from countries of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region shows an increase in acute flaccid paralysis and decrease in poliomyelitis as compared to the year 1993. The figures were as follows:

	Acute flaccid paralysis	Poliomyelitis
1993	495	2 451
1994	755	922

Reference: Polio Fax, WHO and UNICEF, 1 February 1995.

Regional meetings

The role of the mass media in the prevention and control of AIDS

Two workshops were held on this topic in Cairo, Egypt from 19 to 21 November 1994 and in Islamabad, Pakistan from 28 to 30 November 1994. Both workshops focused on reviewing the present situation of mass media coverage of the issues of AIDS prevention and control.

The participants identified the obstacles encountered in the mass media information

activities and proposed appropriate solutions therefore. The participating senior media and health officials formulated a number of practical and feasible recommendations addressed to the national health and information authorities as well as to the World Health Organization.

Iranian Vital Horoscope

The Islamic Republic of Iran has developed an action-oriented primary health care information system used at the health houses and centres levels and known as a "Vital Horoscope". A workshop was held at the Conference Hall of the Isfahan University in Isfahan from 27 September to 1 October 1994 to allow participants to see the vital horoscope in operation and gain hands-on experience in its use, limitations, requirements, etc., and hence develop operational guidelines on it as well as plan activities for its wide use.

Follow-up of the International Conference on Nutrition

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization jointly convened an Intercountry Workshop on the follow-up of the International Conference on Nutrition (ICN). The Workshop was held in the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office, Alexandria, Egypt, from 25 to 29 September 1994, to provide an opportunity for the participating countries to exchange information and experience regarding the preparation and implementation for the National Plan of Action for Nutrition. It is expected that the results of this workshop will enhance cooperation between Eastern Mediterranean countries through the development of a regional network on nutrition.

Food safety legislation and street food vending

The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office in collaboration with the Government

of Cyprus organized a workshop around this topic in Limassol from 12 to 15 September 1994.

The purpose of the workshop was to promote the need for updating and establishing modern food legislation along with the guidelines of experience on legislative aspects among countries, to train and acquaint the concerned technical staff with health risks involved in street vending of food and to promote the establishment of essential safety requirements and programmes.

Regional Conference on Medical Education

A Regional Conference on Medical Education was held in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, from 29 January to 1 February 1995. This Conference was organized by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME), associations for medical education in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO) and the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, United Arab Emirates. It was sponsored by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Ministry of Health of the United Arab Emirates. The Conference was attended by 238 delegates from 12 countries of the Region, including government ministries of health and education, faculties of medicine and health sciences, health administrators, health providers and students. Distinguished guests and experts from all over the world also attended.

The main theme of the Conference was the interface and collaboration between health

care and health personnel education and training, particularly the changes necessary to make education relevant and responsive to community health needs and problems.

The dramatic changes occurring in health as well as human life has led to changes in mortality and morbidity patterns, the appearance of new diseases such as AIDS, the resurgence of others, such as malaria and tuberculosis. The growth in knowledge and technology and changes in the lifestyles of people coupled with developments in communications has necessitated changes in both health care provision and medical education.

The Conference discussed all these issues exploring the future of health care and medical education in the Region, the models of cooperation between the two systems and the development of human resources in the health field in general.

Recommendations were made to countries of the Region, to the WFME, to the Regional associations for medical education, to faculties of medicine and to WHO. One of these recommendations requested EMRO to call a meeting of all education and health ministers of the Region in order to establish a mechanism for effective collaboration between health care systems and medical education systems in the Region. A clear mandate was also given in the recommendations to countries, WFME and WHO to take the necessary steps for drawing an effective national and regional plan of action for ensuring closer collaboration between the health services and health personnel training institutions.