



From left to right: Dr Rana Hajjeh, WHO Director of Programme Management, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr Hossam Sharkawi, IFRC Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, Dr Rami El-Nazr, Head of Egyptian Red Crescent Society

9 November 2020 – On 3 November 2020, Dr Ahmed Al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, held a meeting with representatives of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), led by the Regional Director of the IFRC in the Middle East and North Africa Dr Hossam Sharkawi, and accompanied by Ms Rania Ahmed Shafik, Deputy Regional Director in the Middle East and North Africa, and Dr Rami El Nazr, Head of the Egyptian Red Crescent Society.

Also present at the meeting were the Director of Programme Management Dr Rana Hajjeh, Chef de Cabinet Dr Jaffar Hussain, and Director of the Department of Communication, Resource Mobilization and Partnership Dr Amir Hassan.

The WHO Regional Director briefed the IFRC team about WHO's ambitious vision to guide its work with Member States in the Eastern Mediterranean Region for the next 3 years and the strategy and monitoring mechanism that had been created to help the Organization achieve its vision. They also discussed key areas of current and potential future collaboration in addressing humanitarian emergencies, expanding partnerships and strengthening health systems.

WHO's "Vision 2023" document was launched in October 2018 and outlines the focus of efforts in the Region until at least 2023. At its heart is the principle of Health for All by All – the idea that everyone, from governments and health professionals through to organizations, communities and individuals, can help to maximize health and well-being across the Region.

Along with the vision, a WHO strategy for the Eastern Mediterranean Region for 2020–2023 has also been developed. The strategy identifies the main priorities for the Region and explains how these will be pursued through specific strategic objectives. The strategy includes clear targets and indicators so that progress can be measured and reported upon.

As the Region is facing an unprecedented scale of emergencies, their discussions focused on ensuring comprehensive preparedness, responding promptly to emergencies and implementing well-planned measures toward recovery. The 67th session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean and other meetings had shown how ministers of health were actively engaged in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring continuity of essential health services and working collaboratively to strengthen partnerships and promote effective responses to health emergencies in the Region.

The meeting concluded with agreement on a set of action points, which included:

- following up with the WHO headquarters' focal point on a draft WHO memorandum of understanding with IFRC focusing on support to countries in emergencies and those with fragile health systems;

- engaging the WHO Health Emergencies Programme and WHO Department of Universal Health Coverage/Health Systems to facilitate country level collaboration with the IFRC to support health system strengthening, improve access to medicines and vaccines and implement a range of other country level activities.

They agreed that following successful implementation of initial activities, they could build on progress to strengthen future collaboration, particularly in the areas of engaging communities to strengthen the COVID-19 response, improving access to services for refugees and migrants, administering any potential COVID-19 vaccine, especially to frontline workers, and strengthening trauma care.

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