



## Launching of the National Strategy on Health and Environment 2021 - 2026

7 April 2022, Beirut □ World Health Day is celebrated globally today, under the theme “Our Planet, Our Health” focusing on environmental threats and their effects on the health of the planet. On this occasion, the WHO Lebanon country office seizes the opportunity to launch the Environment and Health Strategy 2021 – 2026, which was elaborated in consultation with key stakeholders. This strategy will be led by the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Environment.

The National Strategic Framework of Action is in line with the Arab Health and Environment Strategy 2017-2030 to which Lebanon is committed, and the WHO EMRO Health and Environment Strategy 2014-19.

The currently developed 5-year Strategic Framework 2021-2026 specifies the strategic responses, strategic activities, and sub-activities, coordinating and collaborating governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, time-frame for implementation, and indicators to be reported to WHO by 2025 and 2030, focusing on nine environmental health priorities identified for the Arab Region.

Dr. Iman Shankiti, the representative of the World Health Organization in Lebanon, indicated in her speech, "I would like to emphasize that caring for the environment and a healthy environment per se are goals that are equally important to fight poverty and economic development, but more so a prerequisite for achieving the well-being of people."

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, environmental risks, including climate change, are

responsible for 23% of the total burden of disease and as much as 30% of the disease burden for children. An estimated 1 million people die prematurely every year as a result of living and working in unhealthy environments.

“The climate crisis is also a health crisis,” says Dr. Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO’s Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, “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.”

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. However, COVID-19 brought about some short-lived positive effects on the environment through reduced global travel, with quarantine procedures in place in all countries, reduced number of mass gatherings, and improved adherence to infection prevention and control measures that have all resulted in improvements to the environment. We need to ensure that we can sustain these improvements.

In Lebanon, the situation is compounded by the lack of electrical power which is replaced by major dependence on generator-powered electricity. This leads to worsening pollution of the air not only in the cities but also in villages and smaller remote areas.

Climate change leading to heat waves saw many fires that produced air pollution and ate up the rich green nature of Lebanon.

In his word, Dr. Firass Abiad, Minister of Public Health said, “One of the lessons we have learned from the pandemic is that the first step to solving any challenge is to acknowledge its existence and understand its causes, then develop a plan for moving forward. This, of course, cannot succeed without being based on a strong will for change, and in the hope of a better tomorrow. Now we have a chance to build better health systems for the future. Without these systems, we will repeat the mistakes of the past”.

Dr. Nasser Yassin, Minister of Environment stated, “Our full conviction is that Lebanon's

recovery is coming. The recovery of Lebanon, its society, its economy, and its population must be a recovery based on the principles of sustainability, the need for a healthy environment, and the promotion of the health and well-being of the Lebanese. We must work hard in order to achieve this goal”.

On this World Health Day, WHO calls on everyone – governments, businesses, health professionals, civil society, communities, and individuals – to protect our planet and our health.

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Friday 3rd of May 2024 03:25:28 PM