

Cairo, 2 May 2015: The World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean held the fourth seminar on health diplomacy in Cairo, Egypt, from 2 to 4 May 2015. More than 90 senior officials from ministries of health and foreign affairs, ministers and permanent missions at the United Nations in Geneva, ambassadors, heads of parliamentary health committees and regional public health institutes attended the meeting.

Participants discussed how to integrate the concepts and approaches of health diplomacy within foreign policy and other executive and legislative government platforms in order to address the critical health challenges that require engagement of other sectors and those that cross domestic and regional boundaries and are global in nature.

Global health diplomacy refers to the negotiation processes that shape and manage the national and global policy environment for health. It focuses on health issues that cross national boundaries and those that require political solutions and multisectoral engagement. This is the fourth high-level seminar that WHO has organized since 2012 in order to facilitate the discussion, the information exchange and the analysis regarding the linkages between health and foreign policy, globally and in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region.

“Health is everybody’s business, not only the health sector’s. Countries need to address health challenges that can undermine sustainable development, and compromise stability and national and global security, such as pandemics and climate change. Health diplomacy opens corridors for humanitarian assistance and transforms health into a bridge for peace”, said WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Ala Alwan. “During this seminar, we aimed at strengthening the capacity of representatives of Member States to understand, act upon and positively influence diplomatic and policy outreach to health issues of highest priority and relevance to our Region,” he added.

While health diplomacy is instrumental in influencing policy decision-making and negotiation dynamics, forging the health–foreign policy link is very challenging in view of the rapid changes that constantly take place in global health and foreign policy. Participants from foreign policy, health and parliament also looked at ways of building capacity and strengthening coordination and joint work at the national level while reinforcing their role in global health discussions at international forums. They also examined the successes and challenges in responding to issues of regional interest around the interface between health, foreign policy, trade and human rights.

The key priority health issues of relevance to the Region include the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals, noncommunicable diseases, health security and emergencies.

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