



Cairo, 11 October 2021 □ The 68th session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean was inaugurated today in Cairo by Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, and H.E. Dr Hala Zayed, Egypt's Minister of Health and Population and chair of last year's session. The Regional Committee is being attended virtually by ministers of health and high-level representatives of the 22 countries of WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region, and representatives of international, regional and national organizations. The theme of this year's session is "Rebuilding better and fairer: stronger systems, resilient communities".

In his opening remarks, Dr Al-Mandhari said: "Despite the great challenges and difficulties faced, we have not allowed them to stop us from moving forward. Instead, we have turned most of them into opportunities that opened up new prospects for action in the Region and encouraged us to unhesitatingly take a number of corrective actions, with concerted collective efforts, pursuant to our regional vision that calls for solidarity and action to achieve Health for All by All."

Dr Al-Mandhari highlighted the urgent need for strong and resilient health systems, underpinned and supported by stronger economic, social and security systems. He noted that crises in the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region have led to more than 32 million people being forcibly displaced, accounting for 40% of forcibly displaced people globally. He also pointed out that wild polio is now only endemic in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, where it continues to infect and disable children.

Addressing the Regional Committee, Egypt's Minister of Health Dr Hala Zayed said that while the pandemic still dominates people's lives, populations are adapting to the new normal, and the fight against COVID-19 continues apace.

“Our work over the past year has been rewarding, but much more needs to be done, and I look forward to address, jointly with you, the public health priorities of our region as part of this year’s Regional Committee agenda, in order to ensure the continuation and non-stop provision of basic health services in light of the critical situation that... not only Egypt, but the Eastern Mediterranean Region, is passing through,” she said.

In his opening remarks, WHO Director-General Dr Ghebreyesus addressed the difficult circumstances some countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region face, particularly Afghanistan and Lebanon, and reiterated that WHO continues to work to support health systems and the delivery of essential services in the face of difficult circumstances.

“The breakdown in health services is affecting the availability of basic and essential health care, as well as emergency response, polio eradication, and COVID-19 vaccination efforts,” he said.

Addressing the COVID-19 situation in the Region, Dr Ghebreyesus noted that while cases and deaths are at their lowest levels for a year, some countries remain in a very serious situation:

“We need better global governance that is inclusive, equitable and accountable. We seek your commitment to stay the course with proven public health and social measures that we know work, in combination with vaccination; your support for the idea of an international agreement on pandemic preparedness and response; and, third, your support for building a stronger WHO that is empowered and financed sustainably,” Dr Ghebreyesus said.

Regular sessions of the 68th Regional Committee start tomorrow.

For more information

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