



WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean opens primary health care centre in Dohuk, Iraq,. From left to right: Dr Sayed Jaffar Hussain, WHO Representative in Iraq; Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director; Dr Rekawt Hama Rasheed, Minister of Health of the Kurdistan region; Mr Naseer Shamma, Iraqi musician Erbil, Iraq, 14 March 2015 – WHO’s Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr Ala Alwan, visited Dohuk governorate of the Kurdistan region of Iraq to officially hand over 15 ambulances and 2 mobile medical clinics to Dohuk health authorities. The donation will provide health services and medical treatments for more than 60 000 beneficiaries for three months.

Following the hand-over ceremony, Dr Alwan visited Bajet Kandala camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and met with families to hear first-hand accounts of their urgent health needs and inaugurate the primary health care centre established with financial support from WHO. The Kurdistan Minister of Health Dr Rekawt Hama Rasheed and the renowned Iraqi musician, Naseer Shamma, visited the camp as well. Mr Shamma is working closely with WHO in raising awareness about the serious humanitarian situation of IDPs.

Dr Rasheed thanked WHO for the most recent donations saying: “I would like to acknowledge the commitment and tremendous efforts WHO has been making to respond to the urgent needs of the displaced population. This donation of mobile clinics and 15 ambulances will improve the delivery of health services to vulnerable populations, mostly in out of reach areas.”

“The situation is extremely serious,” said Dr Alwan. “It is critical to respond urgently to the lack of basic health services for the internally displaced Iraqi population. Millions of men, women and children have had their lives needlessly destroyed and face an uncertain future. Many of these

people are particularly vulnerable: young children, pregnant women, people with disabilities, the elderly, and those who need life-saving treatment for diseases like cancer, diabetes and heart conditions. Without effective health services, they are at a higher risk of disease and death. WHO has an established presence on the ground in Dohuk and is working with health authorities and partners to improve access for all affected populations to health care and services they urgently need.”

Over the past three years, Dohuk has seen its population increase by almost 20%, hosting more than 50% of all Syrian refugees in Iraq and receiving more than half a million displaced Iraqis since June 2014, accounting for almost 30% of the total number of IDPs in the entire country. There are currently 17 IDP camps in Dohuk, with many IDPs also living among host communities and in public spaces, such as abandoned buildings and unused schools. As a result of the influx of IDPs in Dohuk, the health system is overwhelmed, with an increase of more than 65% of the patient caseload on existing health facilities. This has led to shortages in health staff and essential medicines and medical supplies, and resulted in an increased number of health risks.

Key public health concerns among affected populations in Dohuk include increased risk of communicable diseases due to overcrowded living conditions; increased risk of mortality or complications as a result of untreated chronic conditions such as diabetes, chronic respiratory disease and cancer; and increased need for mental health services for those suffering from grief, non-pathological distress, depression, and anxiety disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

To prevent the spread of communicable diseases, especially in areas with high concentrations of IDPs, where living conditions are overcrowded, WHO has strengthened the communicable disease surveillance system throughout the governorate. In partnership with UNICEF and the Dohuk Directorate of Health, more than 254 000 children under 5 years of age were immunized against polio and 216 000 children under 5 years of age immunized against measles, during the most recent vaccination campaign from 22 February to 10 March 2015 targeting the host community, IDPs and Syrian refugees.

WHO provided a total of four mobile medical clinics, procured through funding from Saudi Arabia, to deliver primary health care services to IDPs in remote areas; and 15 ambulances to support the referral system in the camps for IDPs; and medicines and medical supplies for 1.2 million beneficiaries. Together with Iraqi health authorities, more than 5.6 million children have been vaccinated against polio and 3.9 million children against measles, through national and sub-national immunization campaigns.

“While much has been achieved in Iraq, much more needs to be done,” noted Dr Alwan. “The health situation in Iraq is critical. WHO and partners can only do so much with the funding that is currently available. With additional funding, we will be able to reach more people and save more lives.” Dr Alwan stressed the catastrophic outcomes that might result from the interruption in delivery of health services, particularly regarding the prevention of communicable diseases.

More than 5 million people in Iraq are need of humanitarian and health services. Of the US\$ 314.2 million required by the health sector, only US\$ 95.5 million has been received (30.4%), leaving a critical funding gap of US\$ 218.7 million.

WHO calls on the international community and donors to provide urgently needed funds quickly in order to prevent further humanitarian suffering of the displaced in Iraq. The renowned Iraqi musician Naseer Shamma will launch a fundraising campaign, in collaboration with WHO, to support the Iraqi displaced, giving a number of concerts, the proceeds of which will be used to cover some of the health needs.

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