

18 January 2022, Cairo-Beirut – The WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari and the Regional Director of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Dr Hossam Elsharkawi, today signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance collaboration to support countries in the Middle East and North Africa respond effectively to key public health challenges.

The aims of the agreement between WHO and IFRC are to strengthen the support provided to countries in order to improve the health and well-being of populations living in emergencies, and protect and improve the health of vulnerable groups through ensuring access to essential health services, in addition to strengthening country capacity to provide access to sustainable, affordable and quality health services across the life course. The agreement also aims to strengthen leadership, governance and advocacy for health.

During the virtual ceremony, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, expressed his appreciation of WHO's valued partnership with IFRC. "With a long history of collaboration with IFRC and working together to serve humanity, I am confident that this joint agreement can serve as a roadmap for us to strengthen support to countries and enhance national efforts to address key public health challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond in order to meet the urgent health needs of all people in the region. It is a true interpretation of our vision; health for all by all: a call for action and solidarity".

In his opening remarks, Dr Hossam Elsharkawi, IFRC's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa said, "Addressing current and future humanitarian challenges requires the strong commitment of all partners and courageous leadership that focus on locally led actions and interdependence. We are honoured to work alongside WHO and leverage our volunteer network to advance progress towards universal health coverage, strengthen emergency response and preserve the dignity of all people."

Dr Rana Hajjeh, Director of Programme Management at the WHO Regional Office, noted that the memorandum of understanding focused on the health challenges related to emergencies such as outbreaks, epidemics and the COVID-19 pandemic. "The pandemic has been a game changer for all countries and demonstrated the importance of effective preparedness and response to emergencies, and it has highlighted how, we as international organizations, can provide targeted support to countries to help them build capacity and strengthen community resilience."

Rania Ahmed, Deputy Regional Director of IFRC, noted, “Today, the WHO/IFRC agreement is reaffirming our continued commitment to work together to create change that results in a positive impact on people’s lives. Our partnership emphasizes the need to develop policies that respond to community needs and promote effective community engagement and support to shape evidence-based responses that allow results at scale.”

The collaborative partnership between WHO and IFRC aims to further build on country progress to achieve universal health coverage and enhance national health systems. It focuses on strengthening regional capacity to effectively prepare for, and respond to, emergencies. One of the top priorities for WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean Region is to ensure and availability of mental health and other essential health services for all people, including displaced persons and refugees.

The memorandum of understanding takes immediate effect and will be implemented with the direct involvement of all national stakeholders and WHO country offices in the region.

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