



17 September 2019 – WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari has concluded his first visit to Somalia, where he launched the country's roadmap

to universal health coverage (UHC) together with the Federal Minister of Health, and met with representatives of United Nations agencies, health leaders and partners, internally displaced Somalis, and health workers to review the health response and identify ways of strengthening WHO's work in the country.

“Somalia is a key player when it comes to advancing the health agenda in the Region. In the past 5 years, the country has made key advances in eradicating polio, controlling measles and cholera, and reducing maternal mortality rates,” said Al-Mandhari. Meeting with the UN Secretary General Special Representative and UN Resident Coordinator, Al-Mandhari advocated to put health at the centre of the humanitarian health agenda in Somalia, stressing that good health and well-being were the key foundations of a prosperous society.

More than 30 years of civil war, coupled with natural disasters such as drought and floods, have weakened Somalia's health system and left more than 3 million Somalis in need of health aid. Famine and insecurity have contributed to the spread of malnutrition and disease outbreaks, and lack of access to health care has resulted in Somalia having some of the lowest health indicators in the world.

Through its UHC roadmap, Somalia aims to increase the number of people who have access to health services, especially the poorest and those living in hard-to-reach areas, so that no Somali is left behind. At the event held to launch the roadmap with the deputy Prime Minister, state ministers, ambassadors and parliamentarians, Al-Mandhari highlighted the importance of the allocation of more resources in order for UHC to become a reality in Somalia.

“During my visit, I met Somalis who have shown great resilience, despite the many challenges they have faced. I met children suffering from malnutrition, chronic diseases and other conditions being treated in clinics and facilities supported by WHO and partners. I also met front line health workers who are dedicated to helping their people no matter the difficulties — our job is to support them, so that they can continue to save lives everyday,” said Al-Mandhari.

Strengthening primary health care services and improving the capacity of national health workers are 2 key areas that WHO will work on with health authorities and partners, with a focus on mental health care, maternal and child health care, and communicable and noncommunicable disease control.

During his visit to Baidoa, one of the most drought affected areas in Somalia, Al-Mandhari saw the impact of the crisis on displaced Somalis, and identified areas where WHO could scale up its work to respond to their needs. Al-Mandhari and the Federal Minister of Health launched an integrated polio and measles immunization campaign which aims to reach 2.6 million children under the age of 5 in drought-affected districts as part of joint actions to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.

“Meeting with health authorities and UN partners at the federal level in Mogadishu and at the district level in Baidoa, it was clear that succeeding in our mission in Somalia could only be achieved through strong coordination and collaboration with all partners, not only in the health sector, but across all sectors at all levels,” noted Al-Mandhari.

“Somalia is a wealthy country with a lot of potential — not only its history and natural resources — but also in its people. Leaders at national level, UN agencies, and health partners in Somalia are committed to working together to meet the expectations of the Somali people. I urge our donors to recognize the political will that has been demonstrated to ensure the well-being of all Somalis, and to invest in the future of Somalia through the health of its people,” said Al-Mandhari.

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