Photo credit: WHO/I.Hamam17 January 2016 – As part of efforts to strengthen its response to emergencies in the Region and to continue the fight against polio, the World Health Organization (WHO) has established a regional centre for health emergencies and polio eradication in Amman, Jordan. The centre will be inaugurated Sunday 17 January 2016 in an opening ceremony held under the patronage of HRH Princess Muna Al-Hussein of Jordan.

“In our Region, the number of people in need of basic health services as a result of emergencies is unprecedented, and the pressures placed on WHO to respond is greater than ever. Around two thirds of countries in the Region are either experiencing conflict or affected by conflict. More than half the world’s refugees come from our Region, and we also host the world’s largest number of internally displaced populations,” said WHO Regional Director, Dr Ala Alwan. “Iraq, Syria, and Yemen are just 3 in a list of countries in the Region requiring large-scale, ongoing humanitarian health assistance. As we scale up our regional capacity to respond to emergencies, the emergency team based here in Amman will have a key role in ensuring that in all 22 countries of the Region, WHO is better prepared to respond to current and new crises,” Dr Alwan added.

WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean Region is faced with an extremely complex humanitarian situation, with several countries in emergency situations due to protracted conflict, insecurity, and associated mass population movement. WHO has been active in supporting emergency health interventions in these settings and in coordinating health sector support with governments and partners. The reorganization of the regional emergency programme is intended to provide increased support from both Amman and Cairo.

In addition to humanitarian emergencies, the Region also continues to battle for the final eradication of polio, which the World Health Assembly has declared a public health emergency of international concern. Pakistan and Afghanistan, both in the Eastern Mediterranean Region,

are the only two countries in the world where the disease remains endemic. In 2015, substantial success was achieved towards realizing the goal of eradication, as outbreaks that occurred in the Middle East and Horn of Africa were contained following massive multi-country immunization responses, carried out effectively despite conflict and population displacement. Wild poliovirus was also substantially reduced in Pakistan, to 52 cases in 2015 compared to 306 in 2014.

“Now, the key to finally eradicating polio from the whole world is the intense work being carried out to interrupt transmission in Pakistan and Afghanistan,” said Chris Maher, Manager of WHO’s polio eradication programme. “We are in a very hopeful situation but a great deal of work still needs to be done if we are to succeed,” he added.

The inauguration ceremony will take place at 11:30 am on Sunday 17 January.

The media is invited to attend and cover the event. Opportunities for interviews will be available.

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Related link

Polio Eradication Initiative

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