

23 March 2021, Cairo – On 24 March 2021, World Tuberculosis Day will be commemorated globally under the theme “The Clock is Ticking”. The theme serves to remind us that we are running out of time to act on the commitments to end tuberculosis (TB) made by world leaders in the the Political Declaration of the United Nations High-Level Meeting on TB, the WHO End TB Strategy and the 2030 targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

TB is a preventable and curable disease and yet the number of cases is increasing. WHO estimates that in 2019, 819 000 people in the Eastern Mediterranean Region fell ill with TB. Of those, only 6 in 10 received treatment. And drug-resistant TB remains a challenge affecting an estimated 36 000 people in our Region, with only 15% of those people receiving treatment.

Since the global commitments made by world leaders in 2018 in the Political Declaration, there has been some success in galvanizing global and national progress towards targets to end TB; however, more urgent action is needed. "The COVID-19 pandemic has jeopardized recent progress in the fight to end TB," said Dr Ahmad Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. "However, I am pleased to note that many countries in our Region have been taking action to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on essential TB services, in line with WHO guidance," he added.

As the clock is ticking, WHO calls on all concerned parties to accelerate efforts to reach the targets set by the United Nations and world leaders, as part of the SDGs. WHO also calls on governments to address gaps in meeting these global targets as part of efforts to progress towards universal health coverage. We also need multisectoral action and accountability to address the socioeconomic determinants of health. This can only happen if we maintain high-level political commitment and support country investment in ending TB, in synergy with the response to COVID-19. And it can only happen if we work together, hand in hand, with all relevant global, regional and national partners – and most importantly, with the communities affected by TB, in line with our regional vision 2023; health for all by all: a call for solidarity and action.. We need to fulfil our global commitments to defeat this terrible disease. It is time to END TB.

[Message of Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari on the occasion of World TB Day 2021](#)

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