

5 September, 2010, Multan – WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Hussein A. Gezairy visited areas in southern Punjab today affected by Pakistan's devastating floods, meeting with senior health officials and assessing one of the health facilities dedicated to treating diarrhoeal disease cases.

Dr Hussein Gezairy praised the work of Punjab's provincial health authorities in their response to this unprecedented crisis, which has left millions of people vulnerable to waterborne diseases and destroyed and damaged hospitals and clinics.

Accompanying Dr Gezairy were Chief Minister of Punjab, Mr. Mian Mohammed Shahbaz Sharif, Federal Secretary of Health, Mr Khushnod Lashari, and Dr. Jehanzeb Aurakzai, the coordinator of Pakistan's Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Network.

Dr Gezairy was flown by helicopter to survey the impact of the flooding in the Punjab districts of Muzaffargarh, Rahim Yar Khan, Dera Dhin Panah, Rajanpur and Layyah. Later, Dr Gezairy helped open the WHO-supported 25-bed diarrhoea treatment centre, run by Save the Children, in Multan city's Fatima Hospital. More than 10 medical staff operate the centre around the clock. The centre is one of several operating in southern Punjab, along with the 47-bed facility run by the UK-based nongovernmental organization, the Medical Emergency Relief International (MERLIN).

Since the flood crisis started in late July, more than 3 million people have received medical consultations in Punjab, including 361 718 for acute diarrhoea, 618 165 for skin diseases, 444 193 for acute respiratory infections and 374 suspected malaria cases. At least 242 health facilities were damaged or destroyed in the province.

In response, WHO has distributed medicines to partners to cover the potential health needs of 703 000 people in Punjab, including 57 emergency health kits, 63 diarrhoeal disease kits and 150 vials of anti-snake venom.

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