



Press Release

World TB Day marked by conferences in Gaza City and Ramallah

Jerusalem, March 24th, 2011 -Today is World TB Day, a day which commemorates the discovery of the bacteria that causes tuberculosis and serves as a reminder that 1.6 million people die every year from the disease. Though TB is a highly contagious and easily transmittable disease, it is treatable and curable if necessary precautions are taken.

World TB Day 2011 enters into the second year of the **"On the move against tuberculosis"** campaign focusing on innovation in TB research and care.

The day will be marked in the occupied Palestinian territory by conferences for health and community professionals in Ramallah and in Gaza, organized by the Ministry of Health, with financial support from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and technical partnership with WHO and UNDP.

The day also coincides with the first year anniversary of the Global Fund funded Palestinian TB programme. The 2.12 million euro, five-year programme, aims to update knowledge, modernize the detection and treatment of tuberculosis in the Palestinian territory.

Veronique Maeva Fages, the manager of the Global Fund programme in the occupied Palestinian territory highlighted the exceptional achievements of the Palestinian National TB programme with its updated strategy and guidelines. "Training of health staff, nurses and medical doctors, as well as laboratory technicians are currently being scaled up in order to improve TB case detection rates and contact tracing in the oPt" she said.

Every year there are 8.6 million new cases of TB but there has been an increasing number of cases which are resistant to treatment, particularly in the former Soviet Union and Asia where in some places up to one quarter of new cases reported were resistant to drugs. Treatment of patients with the new form of tuberculosis takes much longer and costs much more than standard treatment.

The TB prevalence remains among the lowest in the region and Palestinian health authorities are committed to keep this low figure and improved surveillance systems. For example, the reported TB pulmonary cases went down from 3.73% (1996) to 0.46% (2009). In 2010, 176 TB suspects among Palestinian refugees and 86 contacts of smear positive TB patients were screened and less than 10 patients were successfully detected and treated as per the revised TB national guidelines. Furthermore, as TB is, worldwide, the first opportunist infection correlated with the HIV infection, all TB suspected cases were also tested for HIV as per the latest Palestinian TB national policy.

TB thrives in overcrowded communities that receive inadequate nutrition and hygiene such as refugee camps or even Bedouin communities. Transmission of TB is reduced if patients are detected and treated rapidly.

The Global Fund's grant, which is administered by the United Nations Development Programme and shared with the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in the Near East, is designed to raise the detection rate of cases of TB from 5 per cent to 70 per cent and improve the treatment of patients. Through the programme, GFTAM, UNDP will be also be contributing to the achievement of MDG goal number 6 addressing HIV and AIDS, Malaria and other associated diseases.

For further information, please contact:

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