

12 March 2017 – The joint health and environment ministerial meeting was convened in the Arab League premises in Cairo, Egypt, on 2 March 2017, presided by Arab League Secretary General and the Presidents of the 2 Arab Councils: the Council of Arab Health Ministers and the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment; along with WHO and United Nations Environmental Programme (represented by the United Nations Under Secretary General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environmental Programme). Numerous ministers of health and the environment, under-ministers, ambassadors, as well as high-level delegations from the Region attended the event.

The statement of Dr Mahmoud Fikri, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, was delivered by the Director of the Regional Centre for Environmental Health Action. In his message, Dr Fikri stated that "WHO estimates that environmental degradation is causing over 628 000 premature fatalities annually, representing 23% of total deaths in the Region; and this figure increases to 26% in the children under-5 group ... therefore it is necessary to adopt and implement an integrated ecological health strategy to reduce the burden of disease and mortality resulting from environmental risk exposures in our Region".

The Regional Strategy on Health and Environment and Framework (2017–2030), developed by the WHO Regional Office and WHO Regional Centre for Environmental Health Action, Arab League and United Nations Environmental Programme was presented and approved by all Arab States. The ministers issued a political Ministerial Declaration on Health and the Environment, and endorsed the formation of the Joint Ministerial Forum on Health and the Environment. The above mentioned Ministerial Forum meets annually for high-level experts and twice a year at the ministerial level. The Arab League, WHO and the United Nations Environmental Programme will serve as the technical secretariat of the Ministerial Forum.

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