



WHO Representative for Iraq Dr Adham Ismail visits Iraq Supreme Seminary to mobilize support to postpone religious gatherings in Iraq Baghdad, Iraq, 9 April 2020 – The World Health Organization (WHO) commends the call by the religious Supreme Seminary in Iraq to postpone religious gatherings and its commitment to ensuring implementation of prevention measures recommended by WHO and local health authorities in Iraq.

The exponential spread of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) around the world and the global rise in the number of infections and associated deaths necessitates limiting all social events and mass gatherings, including religious pilgrimages to holy sites. In this respect, WHO is disseminating clear recommendations to governments and the public to temporarily halt these activities in order to limit transmission of the disease.

“The Seminaries, mainly in Najaf, Kerbala, and Kadimiya are in full support of WHO and Ministry of Health recommendations. We stress the importance of staying home, avoiding gatherings, and consider social distancing to avoid the unintentional harm caused by transmitting the disease,” said Dr Adham Ismail, WHO Representative in Iraq. “WHO thanks the response of the esteemed Seminaries in Iraq and appreciate their support to health authorities efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19 in Iraq,” he added.

Iraq was expecting millions of pilgrims to head to the holy city of Kerbala on 8 April 2020 in one of the biggest religious ceremonies. Fearing this would widen the range of infection, WHO and Federal Ministry of Health in Baghdad made a series of visits to these areas and met with religious seminaries in Najaf, Kerbala, and Kadhimiya in Baghdad to mobilize support for postponing all religious gatherings and advising people to perform religious rituals from their homes until the COVID-19 outbreak in the country is stabilized.

The Supreme Seminary in Najaf, earlier called upon Iraqis to follow the Ministry of Health's directives and not to underestimate the repercussions of this virus and its dangers. It also obligated people to respect the lockdown and to support national health staff by staying home to

limit the spread of infection, ease the burden on health facilities, and minimize morbidity and mortality.

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