13 August 2020 – On 6 August 2020, militia near the town of Al Zawya (western Libya) intercepted a truck on its way to Benghazi and Tobruk to deliver WHO humanitarian supplies. The driver was detained overnight and his phone was confiscated. However, he was able to send a message to the WHO country office to inform it of the unfolding situation. WHO immediately contacted the Ministry of Health in Tripoli and asked it to intervene.

The following morning, the militia directed the driver to deliver the supplies to a nearby health care facility. The goods he delivered included supplies of insulin, which must be kept refrigerated. Since WHO cannot ascertain whether the insulin cold chain has been maintained, it has informed the health authorities that the insulin must be considered as no longer viable and consequently discarded.

WHO has repeatedly asked the national authorities in Tripoli to intervene and ensure the supplies are restored to WHO for distribution to health facilities in the east. As of the time of writing, the goods (with a value of just over US$ 22 000) have not been returned to the Organization.

Ms Elizabeth Hoff, the WHO Representative, said that this was a new and worrying development. “This is the first instance of aid diversion in Libya since I arrived here in July 2019. The security and political situation is as complex as ever. Our humanitarian mandate is to deliver aid to all who require it, regardless of their political or religious affiliations. Interference by militia and other armed groups is wholly unacceptable and against all humanitarian aid principles.”

WHO is monitoring the situation carefully and will highlight this and any future incidents of aid diversion at the highest levels, nationally and internationally.

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