



15 October 2018, Cairo – Health ministers and high-level representatives of the 22 countries and territories of WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region, partner and civil society organizations will gather in Khartoum next week to attend the 65th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, being hosted by the Government of Sudan, from 15 to 18 October 2018.

The Regional Committee is WHO's decision-making body in the Region, convening once a year to discuss and endorse regional policies, activities and financial plans. Its inaugural session, on the morning of 15 October, will be attended by Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, HE Dr Mohamed Abu Zaid Mustafa, Federal Minister of Health of the host country, Sudan.

Dr Al-Mandhari was elected as WHO Regional Director in May this year and assumed office on 1 June. In his first Regional Committee, Dr Al-Mandhari will outline WHO's regional vision for its work with countries from 2018 to 2023 in the document "Vision 2023: health for all by all in the Region – a call for solidarity and action". "Vision 2023 represents a renewed commitment to WHO's mandate and fundamental goal of health for all, but it is also a call for partnership, solidarity and action by all towards achieving this aspiring goal. We need to engage everyone – governments, professionals, nongovernmental organizations, communities, civil society and individuals – as proactive agents for health," stated Dr Al-Mandhari.

Key public health issues being addressed on this year's agenda correspond to the priorities identified in WHO's Thirteenth Programme of Work (GPW13) – advancing universal health coverage (UHC), protecting people from the impact of health emergencies, promoting health and well-being, optimizing WHO's performance and engaging the private sector to progress towards UHC.

UHC is high on the agenda following the momentous signing of the Global UHC 2030 Compact during the ministerial meeting in Salalah, Oman, in September 2018. Multiple global and regional commitments have identified it as a top priority, notably including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and WHO's GPW 13 with its 1 billion target of ensuring that 1 billion more people benefit from UHC. UHC can only be achieved by building strong and resilient people-centred health systems and recognizing that the private sector, which in many countries is the dominant outpatient health services provider, remains an untapped resource to further advance progress towards UHC in the Region.

Work is ongoing to quantify how WHO's support to countries can contribute to the GPW's 1 billion target of ensuring that 1 billion more people are better protected from health emergencies by 2023 but WHO's priorities at regional and country level are ensuring that populations affected by emergencies have access to essential life-saving health services and public health interventions, and that all countries are at reduced risk of high-threat infectious hazards through assessing and addressing critical gaps in preparedness for health emergencies.

Another key issue for discussion is how WHO can optimize its performance to ensure maximum impact at country level. The Organization has adopted a fundamental transformative change in its working 'business' models, systems and culture in the Region ensuring it becomes an increasingly accountable and dynamic catalytic leader in health.

"The spirit of togetherness and partnership is reflected in the themes of the technical papers being presented at this year's Regional Committee session; they represent the cross-cutting issues for all of our public health programmes. The technical discussions are meant to foster dialogue among WHO, Member States, and partners. I am convinced that our countries have much to share: their own experiences in meeting the pressing public health needs of their own populations and best practices through which they achieve this. With our collective wisdom, together, we can make a positive impact on the health of our people and overcome the challenges our Region is currently facing, especially the ones caused by the unprecedented number of emergencies being witnessed in the Region," added Dr Al-Mandhari.

Participants will also be updated on progress on: polio eradication; the scaling up of family practice; access to assistive technology; implementation of strategic frameworks on health laboratory services and blood safety and availability; tobacco control; implementation of the International Health Regulations; and health issues facing populations affected by disasters and emergencies. These reports provide updates on implementation of resolutions approved by the Regional Committee at previous sessions.

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