



25 June 2019, Tunis, Tunisia □ Yesterday in Tunis, the first meeting of the Parliamentary Forum for Health and Well-being, taking place from 24 to 26 June 2019, opened in the Parliamentarian Academy affiliated to Tunisia's Assembly of the Representatives of the People. It is the first ever WHO-supported meeting to be hosted in a Parliament.

This first meeting brings together parliamentarians from most countries of WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region and aims to strengthen their engagement in advancing health and well-being in the Region.

Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, HE Mr Mohamed Ennaceur, President of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People, HE Dr Sonia Ben Cheikh, interim Minister of Health of Tunisia, and HE Mr Mohamed Trabelsi, Minister of Social Affairs, addressed parliamentarians and other representatives at the opening session of the meeting.

The concept of health as a fundamental human right and key indicator of sustainable development gained new momentum and renewed commitment when in 2015 world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 3 which seeks to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”. WHO’s strategic plan, its Thirteenth General Programme of Work for 2019–2023, is based on the SDGs. Its three strategic priorities – ensuring that one billion more people benefit from universal health coverage, one billion more people are better protected from health emergencies, and one billion more people enjoy better health and well-being – encapsulate each of the health-related targets encompassed by Goal 3.

In the same context, WHO’s Vision 2023 for the Eastern Mediterranean calls for partnership, solidarity and joint action by governments, the private sector, academia, legislative bodies and civil society to achieve “Health For All by All”.

“In our Region, we are used to working with parliamentarians to achieve improved health outcomes. The WHO Regional Office has established partnerships for various health-related priorities, including reproductive and child health, road safety and tobacco control,” said Dr Al-Mandhari. “This meeting marks the crystallization of a new partnership between the WHO Regional Office and parliamentarians in the Region, a partnership that has moved beyond single issues to consider the health and well-being of our people holistically.”

Dr Sohail Alouni, Head of the Health and Social Committee in the Tunisian Parliament, delivered the opening remarks of HE Mr Mohamed Ennaceur, President of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People. In his message, Mr Ennaceur commended the aims of the Forum and said that their work would support attainment of national health goals and promote regional collaboration in achieving universal health coverage and improving health and well-being.

In her opening speech, the interim Minister of Health HE Dr Sonia Ben Cheikh expressed pride that the first meeting of the parliamentary forum was being held in Tunisia. She said that it represented an excellent opportunity to promote sustainable dialogue between parliamentarians and the health sector to ensure improved health outcomes for populations in the Region. She thanked the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the Regional Director for their support to the meeting.

HE Mr Mohamed Trabelsi , the Minister of Social Affairs, stated that Tunisia was ready to cooperate in all areas to benefit citizens in the Region. He said that strengthened cooperation was needed to enhance social justice and for countries to avail the mutual benefit of sharing their experiences to meet the essential needs of their citizens. He stressed the importance of developing policies to reduce poverty and marginalization through health promotion and provide greater employment and economic opportunities.

The Regional Parliamentary Forum for Health and Well-being is a platform of parliamentarians from the Eastern Mediterranean Region who are working together to address regional strategic public health priorities to advance the health and well-being of their populations. As part of its efforts to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is providing technical support to the Forum and facilitating its activities.

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