

29 April 2014 – The relationship between health and foreign policy interests has progressed in recent years as health moves beyond its purely technical realm to become a critical element in foreign policy, trade and security. The broad political, social and economic implications of health issues have brought more diplomats into the health arena and more public health experts into the world of diplomacy. In this context, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is convening a third regional seminar on health diplomacy from 3 to 5 May 2014 in Cairo, Egypt.

“There is an increasing range of health issues that transcend far beyond national boundaries and require action on the global level,” said Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. “This seminar will bring about the understanding of how multi-level and multi-actor negotiation processes can shape and manage our policy environment for health and in the interest of our population welfare,” he added.

The concept of health diplomacy refers to the negotiation process that shapes and manages the global policy environment for health and becomes an essential part of foreign policy. WHO as the lead intergovernmental organization on health, in close coordination with the office of the United Nations Secretary General, and in consultation with Member States, has taken the leadership role in coordinating policy areas to address current and emerging regional and global health concerns.

The objectives of the seminar are to: build the capacity of representatives of Member States of the Region on health diplomacy with a focus on issues of highest priority and relevance to the Region; and to integrate concepts of health diplomacy into foreign policy as they relate to pressing health issues that cross domestic and regional boundaries that are global in nature.

The seminar will host a distinguished panel of high-level speakers to preview priority issues to be debated, and include a range of case studies pertaining to critical concepts in each of the priority areas. WHO Regional Director Dr Ala Alwan and H.E. Dr Adil Al Adawi, Minister of Health of Egypt, will inaugurate the seminar along with Ambassador Jonas Gahr Store, First Deputy Chair of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs in the Parliament of Norway.

Senior officials from ministries of foreign affairs and health, ambassadors, deans of diplomatic

academies, regional public health institutes, heads of parliamentary committees, regional members of the WHO Executive Board and other stakeholders will participate in the seminar.

Discussions will focus on the contribution of health diplomacy to foreign policy interests in the Region and the post-2015 development agenda and the positioning of health. In addition, a special session on multi-stakeholder diplomacy will focus on non-state actors.

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