

10 February 2016, Baghdad, Iraq: WHO's Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Ala Alwan is meeting senior health officials from the Ministry of Health in Baghdad and local and international health partners to discuss a number of emerging health needs and challenges in the country. The Regional Director and Her Excellency the Minister of Health Dr Adila Hammoud have discussed and endorsed a joint WHO/Ministry of Health biennial cooperation plan for 2016–2017.

“The health needs in Iraq are enormous. WHO has been working closely with the Ministry of Health to implement strategic health objectives and reach more people with better health care and more life-saving services,” says Dr Alwan. “In 2016, WHO and the Ministry of Health will focus on the rehabilitation of health services in the newly liberated areas in Anbar, Salah-EI-Din and Ninawa in addition to addressing a number of public health issues in Iraq and ensuring availability of an essential health services package to returnees in these areas,” explained Dr Alwan.

The current fiscal, security and humanitarian crisis has overwhelmed the health system in the country and compromised accessibility to and quality of health services in a number of areas. An estimated 84% of health facilities are either partially or totally non-functional in security-compromised governorates like Anbar, Ninawa, Salah Aldin, Diyala and Kirkuk, making it a necessity to rehabilitate these facilities in the newly liberated areas, in particular, to reach returnees with guaranteed access to essential health services.

In 2015, WHO supported the Ministry of Health to improve health systems governance and resilience and respond to the emergency health needs of the most vulnerable populations, such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and host communities. The support has also included among other key achievements, the provision of curative and preventive public health care centre services and implementation of 5 national polio and measles immunization campaigns administering 5.4 million polio vaccines alone to 5.8 million children under 5 years of age. Similarly, WHO, UNICEF and other partners, have supported the Government of Iraq in successively bringing an end to a massive cholera outbreak and in protecting vulnerable populations through a cholera vaccination campaign, during which a total of 510 000 doses of cholera vaccine were administered to 255 000 IDPs and Syrian refugees in 62 camps in 2 vaccination rounds carried out in October and December 2015.

“The Ministry appreciates the collaboration received from WHO and its partners to jointly implement the agreed upon strategic objectives for 2016–2017 biennial cooperation. The

technical support and invaluable contribution provided by WHO has helped the Ministry meet the different health needs in many governorates in 2015 and we do look forward to having more cooperation to face the health challenges anticipated in 2016,” says Dr Adila Hammoud, the Iraqi Minister of Health.

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