



5 October 2015 – The opening ceremony of the 62nd session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean took place in Kuwait today in the presence of more than 200 people, including the representatives of 22 ministries of health from the countries of the Region. His Excellency Mr Said El Aidi, Minister of Health of Tunisia, highlighted the achievements of the last 12 months, particularly in relation to WHO's strategic priorities, including maternal and child health and control of noncommunicable diseases.

Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, welcomed the ministers of health and members of delegations, expressing his appreciation to the host, the Government of Kuwait, for their generous hospitality.

Dr Alwan highlighted the major progress that had been made over the past year in the 5 regional strategic health priorities, particularly in responding to the extreme emergencies in the Region and the health needs arising from them. He outlined the progress made in strengthening WHO's role in emergency response, noting that "Last year we established a regional centre for emergencies and polio eradication in Jordan, and reviewed and adjusted our readiness and response structure and capacities at country level and in the Regional Office." In addition to establishing a dedicated operation and logistic hub, Dr Alwan added that "a regional emergency solidarity fund has also been established and will be funded starting January 2016."

Despite a substantial shortfall in funding, "the Region has tackled heavy adversity with impressive innovation", said WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan. "These innovations align well with the WHO reform requested by our governing bodies and initiated following the independent assessment of WHO's performance during the Ebola outbreak," she explained. Dr Chan stressed the necessity of strengthening the health information system and the commitment to universal health coverage. "Accountability means counting. Reliable information is vital for evidence-based policy-making and efficient resource allocation," she said.

His Excellency Dr Ali Saad Al-Obaidi, the Kuwaiti Minister of Health, in his welcome speech, said that “Holding the Regional Committee in Kuwait is a landmark that reflects the strong ties between our country and WHO.” He observed that the meeting coincided with the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit held in New York to adopt 17 Sustainable Development Goals, including a health-related one. Dr Al-Obeidi expressed Kuwait’s commitment to working with WHO and all partners to advance the health agenda, not only in Kuwait but in the Region as a whole.

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