



12 October 2021, Cairo □ The WHO 68th session of the Regional Committee started its programme today with a presentation by Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, on the 2020 Annual Report.

Dr Al-Mandhari outlined the main actions taken over the past two years in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as an exceptional example of solidarity, a modus operandi that should be adopted for all public health priorities.

"Together, we have mobilized more resources for the COVID-19 pandemic response than any other WHO region. We are not out of the woods yet with the pandemic. Our Region has already lost almost 300,000 people. The Delta variant is widespread, and we still have a lot to do in rolling out vaccination equitably across all countries. But the main message from this year's Regional Committee is: it is time to start rebuilding better and fairer."

Dr Al-Mandhari also raised concerns about other important public health priorities, including noncommunicable diseases that kill millions prematurely each year, declining immunization rates, and severe climate and environmental changes, all urgent health challenges facing the Region.

"Today, I am calling on us all – WHO, Member States and partners – to tackle these challenges with the same drive, innovation, ownership and team spirit that we have shown in fighting COVID," he said.

Dr Al-Mandhari commended countries of the region for their remarkable resilience, and for the progress made in tackling COVID-19 and other emergencies. The Regional Director stressed that “with strong commitment, ways to move forward can be found”.

“We need to use the momentum from the pandemic response to achieve lasting gains in health security and accelerate progress towards universal health coverage, strengthening our health systems, and developing resilient communities.”

“We have learned ways to improve the integration of communicable and noncommunicable disease services into primary health care and other services, including in emergency settings.”

An overview of the Midterm Push Forward Review for the Eastern Mediterranean Region Vision 2023 was presented, highlighting achievements, lessons learned, challenges and success stories, and a concrete way forward in the push towards implementing Vision 2023 in the next biennium.

Members of the Regional Committee also reviewed progress on polio eradication in the Region - the only one in which wild polio is still endemic - as well as the work of the Regional Subcommittee for Polio Eradication. They commended the progress achieved to date, expressing support for the tireless efforts and continued commitment to eradicate wild polio soon from the last two endemic countries.

The Regional Committee also received the most recent updates on emergencies in the Region, and the ongoing efforts to address the global review recommendations. The region has the highest burden of emergencies in the world, with 15 countries currently facing emergencies due to conflicts, wars and natural disasters. A technical paper on accelerating health emergency preparedness and response in the region was discussed and received Member States’ support for its recommendations.

A panel discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provided an update on progress towards health-related SDGs in the Region, noting advances in over half the indicators between 2015 and 2019. Considerable efforts are still needed, however, especially in reducing maternal, child and neonatal mortality; improving vaccination coverage, reducing HIV and malaria cases, and reducing mortality rates due to noncommunicable diseases and pollution.

The panel discussion emphasized the importance of multisectoral approach and partnerships to overcome gaps and challenges and expedite progress towards the SDG targets by 2030.

Related link

[68th session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean website](#)

Monday 6th of May 2024 10:02:03 AM