

Cairo, Egypt, 18 January 2015 – The third regional stakeholders’ meeting to review implementation of the International Health Regulations IHR (2005) concluded in Cairo, Egypt, on 13 January after over 130 participants from 17 countries in the Region collectively reviewed the progress countries are making in achieving the core capacities required under the IHR. The meeting also took into consideration recent findings of WHO assessment of countries’ preparedness and readiness measures for prevention and detection of importation of Ebola virus disease (EVD).

The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean along with national health authorities, recently concluded, between November and December 2014, a rapid assessment of national health sector preparedness and readiness measures for EVD in 18 out of 22 countries in the Region. The assessments were conducted in the six areas of: leadership and coordination; capacities to detect and isolate suspected cases at points of entry such as airport and sea ports; disease surveillance; infection prevention and control; laboratory; and risk communication. The findings were presented in the meeting and practical actions were proposed and suggested by countries on how gaps could be addressed in each of these functional areas.

“It is clear from the assessment that considerable work is required to improve the level of preparedness in the six areas. Countries have our full commitment of support to ensure that each country in the Region is prepared and operationally ready for the detection, prevention and control of Ebola and any other emerging diseases,” commented Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

A short-term operational plan addressing the six major areas was drafted and key activities for the next 90 days were identified in the meeting. These activities are to: develop/update national Ebola virus response plans; conduct a simulation drill to test the effectiveness of the national coordination, an event-based disease surveillance system; urgently procure and stockpile Ebola-specific personal protective equipment; establish and train an Ebola rapid response team improve safe collection, transportation and rapid shipment of samples for testing and diagnostic purpose; develop and drill a public health contingency plan for the designated points of entry; develop risk communications/social mobilization training curricula; and conduct training for stakeholders, journalists, community health workers, as well as volunteers.

The plan also highlighted the urgency of promoting awareness and ensuring high political commitment from countries for implementation of IHR core capacities in accordance with

identified gaps, the strengthening of IHR national focal point capacity, and promoting cross-border collaboration for the sharing of best practices in the areas of managing and responding to acute and emerging health threats.

“Now that we have identified the important gaps in surveillance and response to the threat of Ebola, as well as in the core capacities required under the IHR, let us urgently move forward and rapidly address these gaps within the next 3 months. It is our collective and shared responsibility to prevent any threat to our health security,” said Dr Ala Alwan. The WHO Regional Director emphasized during the concluding session that implementation of the IHR should not be considered a health issue only. A comprehensive multisectoral approach is highly needed to strengthen linkages and tap synergies within and between countries to ensure preparedness for any possible importation of Ebola case in the Region.

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