

Cairo, 10 May 2015 – The fourth annual seminar on global health diplomacy concluded in Cairo with a commitment from participants to advocate for the concept of health diplomacy in their respective countries. The meeting was attended by high-level representatives of health and foreign affairs, including ministers, ambassadors, deans of diplomatic institutes and public health schools, heads and members of parliamentary health committees, and eminent experts in the field.

Health diplomacy expands health issues to areas beyond the health sector, to address challenges from a political, economic and social perspective. The seminar provided an opportunity to share examples of health diplomacy in action, every day, in the Region and beyond. Key among these examples are the coordination and management of the response to Ebola and polio; development of international treaties, such as the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and International Health Regulations (IHR 2005); the work of the United Nations, including the United Nations political declaration on noncommunicable diseases and the new post-2015 sustainable development goals; and the operational work in humanitarian response in Iraq, Syrian Arab Republic and other countries.

Participants agreed on the increasing need for proactive health diplomacy and to raise the profile of health diplomacy in the Region. The health sector is often not directly represented in discussions that in practice affect the health policy environment and, ultimately, the health of people. Interaction and coordination between health, foreign policy and other sectors at the domestic level is crucial.

The third seminar, held in 2014, had proposed the establishment of an advisory group to support WHO in moving the global health diplomacy agenda forward in the Region. This group was established and will propose a regional strategy and road map for enhancing health diplomacy.

The meeting resulted in a number of recommendations, some of which are outlined below.

- Ministries of health need to exercise leadership in health diplomacy in order to enhance coordination and joint work between health and foreign policy. Close coordination between the health and foreign policy sectors ensures that health diplomacy works both in the national and the global interest.
- National seminars on health diplomacy can not only greatly facilitate the understanding of

linkages between the work of the health sector and other sectors but also facilitate development of a national strategic approach that focuses on these intersections.

- WHO will continue to provide support in strengthening negotiation skills in the health sector and understanding of global health issues in the foreign policy sector.
- Effective health diplomacy is built up over time, and depends on trust, common interests and good preparation and negotiating skills. Greater efforts need to be made to engage with non-State actors and civil society to support health goals, including through more effective use of social media.

WHO aims to host an annual seminar on health diplomacy and continue its support to strengthening health diplomacy efforts in countries. For future seminars, representation will be widened to include stakeholders from other sectors, such as trade, education and agriculture.

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Saturday 17th of May 2025 01:49:28 PM