



10 May 2021, Damascus – In responding to the humanitarian needs of affected populations and to enhance the quality of health care in Syria, the World Health Organization delivered 40 equipped ambulances to the Ministry of Health yesterday. Since the onset of the crisis, two thirds of the ambulances in Syria have been destroyed, which has impeded the ability of the emergency services to respond effectively, leading to a critical gap in referral services and causing affected populations to experience life-threatening delays in obtaining emergency health services.

“The ambulances, which will be put into service immediately, will enhance the emergency health system that has been devastated by attacks against health facilities. While further assistance is required to strengthen emergency services, I would like to convey my appreciation to the WHO

country office in Syria and to Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO's Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, who discussed provision of this support during his last visit to Syria in October 2020," said Dr Hasan Al-Ghabbash, the Syrian Minister of Health.

The ambulances will play a major role in strengthening the referral system, a key aspect in achieving universal health coverage. The need for referral services has become critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which it has become increasingly important to coordinate medical referrals from the hospitals where beds were fully occupied to other hospitals with available beds and a sufficient health workforce capacity in order to save people's lives. The delivery of these ambulances will enhance the ability of public health services to respond to medical emergencies, provide timely referrals for patients in severe and life threatening conditions, especially for people living in hard-to-reach areas or those not able to afford transportation.

The delivery is part of a strategy to strengthen the capacity of Syria's public health emergency operations centre, established with the support of WHO in 2020, in Damascus. It is envisioned to build a network of emergency operations centres connecting each and every governorate across the country to enhance preparedness and coordinate an effective response to public health emergencies.

"WHO remains committed to the Syrian people. Strengthening public health emergencies preparedness and response and enhancing referral services with the provision of ambulances is possible thanks to cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the continued support and commitment of donors to the people of Syria and our aim is extending that support to the most vulnerable," said Dr Akjemal Magtymova, WHO Representative in Syria. "We hope that the ambulances will ensure a smooth delivery of life-saving health services to all people in need across the country," said Dr Magtymova.

WHO will continue supporting public health efforts in Syria. Contributing to ending the COVID-19 pandemic remains WHO's major ongoing priority, while in parallel building capacity to prepare and respond to current and future public health risks and emergencies. This is in addition to WHO's core functions of supporting and sustaining vital public health programmes, such as epidemiological surveillance, health information management, programmes on vaccine preventable diseases, trauma and disabilities, prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases and mental health.

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