WHO team in Arafat oversees implementation of appropriate public health measures for prevention, early detection and rapid response to MERS-CoV among pilgrims to Makkah

Cairo, 7 October 2014 – In view of the ongoing public health threats from the Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infection, the WHO Regional Office has stepped up its preparedness efforts across all high-risk countries in the Region.

WHO conducted technical assessments to improve infection prevention and control measures in health facilities, reached out to the pilgrims with effective risk communication strategies and products, organized meetings with the heads of medical missions of the top 10 Muslim countries sending the highest number of pilgrims on public health preparedness for hajj, conducted regional meetings and workshops on enhancing surveillance and strengthening infection control in health care settings as part of the Regional Office's efforts to prevent any international spread of MERS-CoV that may have been associated with hajj this year.

In an effort to improve preparedness for hajj this year, the Regional Office also deployed a four member technical team which is stationed in Mina until 10 October. The team, headed by the WHO Representative in Saudi Arabia, is overseeing the implementation of appropriate public health measures for prevention, early detection and rapid response to MERS-CoV among pilgrims to Makkah.

The team was deployed in accordance with a request received from the Ministry of Health of Saudi Arabia and as part of the WHO Regional Office's ongoing technical support to Saudi Arabia to enhance surveillance for early detection and prevention of any spread of MERS-CV during the hajj.

The team visited Mina, Arafat and Makkah where the Muslim pilgrims assemble for their religious rituals and assessed the public health measures implemented by the Ministry of Health to prevent infection.

As a result of all of WHO's measures, the hajj of 1435 H (2014 G) has passed off without any report of MERS-CoV infection among the pilgrims so far.

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