

Five years after the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, the progress towards achievement of these goals in most of the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region of WHO is slow, including the 10 priority countries that were selected by the WHO Regional Office for Eastern Mediterranean for special assistance based on their health status in reaction to the MDGs.

In order to give momentum to the efforts to move forward with the MDGs, the Regional Office is hosting an intercountry meeting from 17 to 19 October 2005 for the priority countries in the Region, namely: Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen. The meeting provides countries with an opportunity to take more advanced action to achieve the MDGs, through developing or updating their national strategies and plans of actions for achieving the MDGs. The meeting will be attended by more than 70 participants, comprising representatives of Ministries of Health in these countries, experts from WHO, UN agencies and local partners. The meeting will also provide an opportunity for sharing information, identifying gaps and constraints, assessing major needs, and finding ways and means of partnership development, and of estimating the cost of achieving the MDGs.

Slow progress forwards the MDGs is especially evident in regard to goal no.1: "Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger", while it seems that only 4 of the 10 priorities countries will be able to meet goal no.5 aimed at "improving maternal health. Although goal no.6: "combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases," has received the most support in terms of interventions, such as the Roll Back Malaria and Stop TB campaigns, there still remains much to achieve in all the priority countries, except Egypt.

One of the objectives of the meeting is to update the country representatives of the work initiated by the recently established MDG Task Force and to share regional strategies to support Member States to achieve the MDGs. Another objective is to assist the national authorities to identify gaps in resources or capacity, social barriers, and areas that need further support, as well as to improve partnership and strengthen collaboration with potential partners, donors and other UN agencies.

The intercountry meeting will be inaugurated by the Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. Sessions and working groups will run for three days

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