

EMRO held an inter-country meeting on health and human rights with a number of international, regional and national experts in this area with 10 of its member states to activate the relation between the two areas at both regional and national level.

Ideas on how to generate concrete action to integrate health as a basic human right in national policies and strategies were identified. Importantly, the right to health is recognized as encompassing not only access to health services but also the determinants of health such as human security: secured environment: safe drinking water, adequate housing and food and information about health.

Challenges of globalization and the need to address poverty and socio-economic changes such as privatization in more effective ways lead WHO, more recently, to consider human rights as an integral part of its agenda. Every country in the Region is now party to at least one Human right convention or treaty that recognizes the right to health; this supports WHO supporting the right to health from a right based angle.

The meeting recognized the interrelationship between the promotion and protection of human rights in health and Islam. The meeting also discussed examples of human rights violation that impact upon health negatively. Poverty and the lack of access to health services of the poor were identified as urgent concerns for health and human rights. The right to health means access for everyone to affordable health services.

Other pressing issues addressed were poverty and the social changes, the impact of armed conflicts on the health and well being of civilian population in countries such as Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan and other issues such as female circumcision.

In this context, the need for human security which means recognizing the interdependence between nations and the need for cooperation and dialogue between states on how to tackle health problems were highlighted.

In light of the above-mentioned facts the consultation recognized the following steps/ strategies that need to be considered in strengthening the right to health through human right measures:

1. Government leadership in advancing the link between health and human right is vital for positive change at all levels.
2. Raising awareness of peoples rights was recognized as an important step towards the success in implementing health policies; support for government decisions should be generated from the public through raising their awareness about the health related facts. Civil society's role in this context was recognized as exceptionally important.
3. A comprehensive national public health law would provide an essential tool to promote and protect human rights in the context of public health

4. The rapid social and economic changes in the region are leading to new challenges such as privatization of health services. As a result, civil society organizations are getting increasingly involved in providing alternative and affordable health services. This issue requires further attention to ensure appropriate regulation including quality control.

5. Networks between human rights NGOs and NGOs working in the field of development, need to be forged to ensure coordinated and integrated action in the area of health and human rights

6. Building on the leading role of medical syndicates, it is timely that patient charters establishing officially the rights of patients at all levels from access to health care to access to health information, be taken forward by the medical syndicate and its partners.

7. The need to recognize the human right issues in the context of the HIV epidemic was underscored. These include freedom from stigma and discrimination as well as access ARV treatment and to the necessary treatment and care.

8. Particular attention should be given to women and youth in both their role in advancing the relation between health and human rights and in providing them with gender sensitive health care.

9. Mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability are vital to build trust as well as sustainability in health services.

10. The right to health is an obligation of the government across all its sectors. Thus health should be at the core of all national and international policies and decisions.

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