

The media training workshop on health as a human right, organized by WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean from 14 to 15 September 2005, concluded its activities by recommending that the right to health should be ensured to all through activating of and compliance with the international conventions. These include the international convention for economic, social and cultural rights and the international declaration for human rights.

During the workshop, in which a number of media people and representatives of human rights Non Governmental Organizations participated, many research papers prepared by WHO experts were reviewed, all concentrating on the necessity of activating international conventions for human rights.

The participants prioritized a number of issues they thought the media should consider in a more subjective manner and highlight the human right facade of those issues. They agreed that health issues are not prioritized in the proper way due to giving secondary issues of less importance a priority on the expense of more important health issues. Besides, the tendency of some governments towards hiding data and figures related to health issues passively affects the media coverage of those issues.

The participants pointed out the shortage in public awareness related to different aspects of health, as well as the difficulties faced by media people in their fact-finding endeavors, a situation that is essentially attributed to the ambiguity regarding who is responsible for providing facts.

Other issues discussed during the workshop, were the ill treatment of patients in the health care facilities and denying them their basic health rights, as well as the paid advertisements in the health field and its harmful impact on the patients’ choices. This phenomenon is very evident in advertising cosmetics and diet centers.

Violence against human beings, especially the more vulnerable segments was also highlighted as a factor affecting health.

The right to safe and adequate water supply was recognized by all participants as one of the human rights despite the fact that water is not mentioned explicitly in the human rights conventions. It was pointed out that water is regarded as an integral component of other recognized rights such as the rights to: life, adequate standard of living, health, housing and food. The participants called on governments to put the supply of clean drinking water high in their agenda.

At the end of the two day workshop, the participants recommended that media should adopt a balanced handling of health issues and avoid resorting to excitement and exaggeration. They stressed the responsibility of governmental authorities as well as the civil society’s roles to regain consideration and trust for health care services, putting in mind the importance of public awareness as a key element to achieve the required development.

Securing the right for health as a part of the overall human security was strongly recommended by the workshop in light of the international variables derived from the new globalization order that threatens the health of the citizens in the low income countries. Variables such as the world trade organization; the intellectual property directly threatens the affordability of drugs and, consequently, the right of individuals in enjoying health.

Enhancing the roles of supervision, control and accountability were also recommended to safeguard the human right to health.

Finally participants expressed the important and critical role media can play through a more subjective and balanced coverage of health issues.

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