

The 53rd Session of the WHO Regional Committee for The Eastern Mediterranean concluded here in Isfahan today with a strong condemnation of Israel for its continued and recent aggression against Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territory and for its repeated violation of international law, including the illegal use of cluster bombs, and international humanitarian law. The Committee further condemned Israel for not upholding its responsibility as an occupying force to ensure provision of health services to the people of the occupied territories. It requested the WHO Director-General and the Regional Director for The Eastern Mediterranean to submit a fact-finding report on the health consequences of the recent Israeli aggression in Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territory.

With regard to preparedness and response for human pandemic Influenza, the committee recognized the significance and impact of the current outbreaks of avian influenza, and the potential gravity of the anticipated human pandemic influenza. It also recognized; that implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005) is a significant step towards protection of the international community against the potentially devastating consequences of pandemic influenza. The committee endorsed the WHO Eastern Mediterranean strategic plan for avian influenza and human pandemic influenza.

The Regional Committee deliberated on several issues of importance to the Member States and adopted resolutions on subjects of regional priority, including the following.

The Regional Committee expressed Concern at the growing number of reports from Member States referring to alarming signs of a hidden epidemic in pockets of the young population in the Region with regard to hazardous consumption of alcohol. It urged Member States to conduct appropriate research including case studies to determine the magnitude, pattern and trend of alcohol consumption in the Region, and the impact for specific disease conditions and population groups.

The Regional Director was requested to support Member States in the design of research projects and case studies to be used as the basis for development of national health policies, strategies and plans for prevention and control of alcohol consumption and management of its health consequences.

The Regional Committee expressed concern at the knowledge gap and the lack of ability to translate knowledge into action. Nevertheless it recognized the efforts of some Member States in developing strategies and policies for some aspects of knowledge management. The Committee endorsed the regional strategy for knowledge management to support public health, and urged Member States to conduct a situation analysis of information and knowledge management institutions, including publishers, libraries, information centres, information networks, health on the internet, information

technology centers and media centres; The Regional Director was requested by the committee to promote and catalyze public-private partnerships in support of e-health activities in the Region and to provide technical support to Member States to formulate their national policies, strategies and plans for knowledge management and sharing, knowledge generation, use of Information and Communication Technology for health, human resources, and knowledge translation;

With regard to medical devices and equipment in contemporary health care systems and services, the Regional Committee expressed concern at the number of regional problems related to selection, procurement and management of medical devices, at a time when the regional market for medical equipment is growing. It urged Member States to collect and/or update information on medical devices and the processes for technology assessment, selection and management. The Regional Committee requested the Regional Director to establish a task force on assessment, selection and management of medical devices with a view to developing a regional strategy. It also requested him to develop guidelines on assessment, selection and use of medical devices, and to promote norms and standards focusing on quality and cost effectiveness.

The Regional Committee acknowledged the importance of the role played by governments in health development, the significant changes (and challenges facing) the role of government in general and health development in particular and the growing concern over equity in access to quality health care, increasing vulnerability and limited coverage by social protection. The

Committee urged Member States to protect the role of government in service delivery in order to secure access for the poor, vulnerable groups and rural and remote populations and to pay particular interest to improving working conditions for professionals working full time in government facilities.

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