

“TB is a global problem requiring global solutions, and the strong commitment and cooperation of diverse actors and nation states. We all have very important parts to play in providing a launching pad for a momentum in addressing this situation ”. Congratulating the WHO’s Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean for launching the Eastern Mediterranean (EMR) Stop TB Partnership, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, First Lady of Egypt made these remarks while delivering the keynote address here in Cairo. Coinciding with the 14th Coordinating Board Meeting of the Stop TB Partnership, the launch was attended by prominent political, business, public health sector and civil society leaders from the region.

Mrs Mubarak praised the efforts of WHO, the Stop TB Partnership and Ministries of Health in the Region for ensuring implementation of the Stop TB Strategy and making treatment and care available. She also expressed gratitude to the audience, including representatives of partners within the Stop TB Partnership, for their staunch dedication in leading the fight against tuberculosis.

The First Lady, sharing Egypt’s progress, said that the Ministry of Health and Population had reduced TB prevalence by 30% between 1990 and 2005. The treatment success rate now stands at 87%, and the detection rate at 67%. She said that the Egyptian national health reform plan had achieved considerable results, especially in creating more quality services and facilities for victims of TB, including the development of 39 new specialized hospitals. The reform plan had guided the development of diverse community-based systems, which served to mobilize community involvement in fighting this disease, she added.

Earlier, Dr Hussein A. Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, welcomed Mrs Mubarak and said that TB is still a significant development challenge for the Region, causing loss of human life and posing a threat to the development process. Ms Irene

Koek, Chair of the Coordinating Board, Mr Ejaz Rahim, former Federal Minister of Health of Pakistan, and Mr Farid Gibran, of Rotary International, also spoke on the occasion, stressing the need for such a regional forum and pledging their support.

During the proceedings of this landmark two-day event, more than 50 representatives of the public and private health sectors, business community, academia, media and civil society, as the first EMR Stop TB Partnership forum, agreed to the proposed framework and working mechanism for the Partnership. The forum selected an 11 member Executive Board for 6 months, with Prof. Awad Tag El Din, former Minister of Health, Egypt, and Mr Ejaz Rahim, former Minister of Health, Pakistan as Chair and Vice Chair respectively.

The delegates also constituted committees on resource mobilization and to scale up TB care efforts in the Region. The forum welcomed the commitment of the Regional Office of WHO to host the provisional secretariat for 6 months and Special Advisers Dr Zuhair Hallaj, Mr Ejaz Rahim and Dr Kazem Behbahani for resource mobilization within the Region. The delegates adopted and signed the Cairo Declaration to Stop TB in the Eastern Mediterranean Region declaring TB as an emergency in the Region and calling for collective efforts of the regional representatives to fight it.

A gala event was also held to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of WHO and launch of the EMR Stop TB Partnership. A cultural performance by children, videos on 60 years of WHO and TB in the Eastern Mediterranean and musical performances from a well known Nubian troop and a leading Egyptian singer were also part of the media gala.

The Eastern Mediterranean Region of WHO is home to 22 countries: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. TB, a totally preventable and curable disease, causes 110 000 deaths across the Region each year, nearly 300 people every day.

According to WHO, the Region has reported improved case detection and success rates in previous years; some countries have performed well and others are improving their performance. However, the average case detection in the Region is 53%, against the global target of 70% to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

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