

The opening session of the 57th WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean will begin at 9.00 a.m. on Sunday 3 October 2010 at the WHO Regional Office in Cairo. During the meeting Regional Committee members—the ministers of health of Member States of the Region—and experts from WHO headquarters, will review, discuss and take appropriate decisions on a range of crucial health issues.

One item for discussion is infection prevention and control in health care settings. The risk of infection during health care delivery is 2–20 times higher in developing countries than in developed countries and infection rates among patients can exceed 25%. A set of easily-implementable interventions will be proposed to reduce nosocomial infections without major resource implications.

Another item will address improvements in health care financing in the Region. Currently, many patients incur high out-of-pocket health expenditure exposing households to the risk of financial catastrophe and impoverishment. A number of strategic directions will be discussed to expedite the move towards universal health care coverage.

The public health problem of maternal, child and adolescent mental disorders will also be discussed. The estimated prevalence of 15%–36% for maternal mental disorders and 10%–36% for child and adolescent mental disorders in the Region is significantly higher than the estimates for developed countries. Mental disorders are associated with adverse reproductive health outcomes, as well as adverse child and adolescent development outcomes. Committee members will review strategic directions and propose actions to relieve the burden of mental ill-health for these vulnerable sections of society.

The HIV epidemic continues. An estimated 50 000 to 100 000 new infections occurred last year. Despite efforts to prevent further spread of the disease, gaps still exist. The Regional Committee will consider a draft resolution addressing ways to improve knowledge about the epidemic, to reinforce commitment and to address persisting challenges more effectively.

The Committee will also consider a draft resolution on the adoption of a regional strategy on nutrition for the period 2010–2019 to support countries in establishing and implementing actions to improve the nutritional status of people throughout their life cycle.

Health topics for which resolutions were adopted in the previous session will also be discussed, including tobacco use. Several countries have been developing and strengthening their national tobacco control legislation. Tobacco control constitutes one of the most complicated challenges facing the Region due to the lack of a systematic approach for its control.

The report on primary health care-based systems examines countries' increasing commitment to primary health care since the signing of the Qatar Declaration in 2008, whether by promoting the family practice approach or strengthening health systems to achieve universal coverage for those in need.

The issue of polio eradication will also be reviewed. Nineteen countries have maintained their polio-free status and most are close to obtaining certification of poliomyelitis eradication. Afghanistan and Pakistan, however, are still endemic. In Sudan, no imported cases have been reported for several months.

The status of countries' progress in achieving the 2015 targets of the Millennium Development Goals will also be examined. Ten countries are unlikely to achieve these set targets if efforts in this direction are not accelerated.

The Regional Director's annual report on the work of WHO in 2009 and resolutions and decisions of regional interest adopted by the World Health Assembly and Executive Board for World Health Organization will also be reviewed.

A special session on the WHO Framework Convention of Tobacco Control (FCTC) will be held in the afternoon of the first day to mark the fifth anniversary of the Convention. This special session will be chaired by Dr Hussein A. Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, and the main speaker will be Dr Haik Nikogosian, Head of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Ministers of health from Member States of the Region will attend the session.

Invitation is hereby extended to all media personnel to cover both the opening and special sessions of this 57th Regional Committee meeting

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