

8 August 2012, Cairo, Egypt – The World Health Organization is reporting severe shortages in medicines and pharmaceutical products in the Syrian Arab Republic as a result of the current crisis.

More than 90% of medicines in the Syrian Arab Republic were locally produced before the unrest began in February 2011. Since then, economic sanctions, currency fluctuations, difficulty in the availability of hard currency and an increase in operational costs have negatively affected the production of medicines and pharmaceutical products. The recent escalation of clashes has impacted pharmaceutical plants in Rural Aleppo, Homs and Rural Damascus, where 90% of the country's plants are located. Many of these plants have now closed as a result of the ongoing clashes and increased cost of fuel, resulting in a critical shortage of medicines and other life-saving pharmaceutical products.

Syrian Ministry of Health statistics show that prior to the unrest, 52.7% of the population was receiving treatment for gastrointestinal diseases, respiratory diseases, cardiovascular diseases, renal diseases and cancer. Many of these patients are still dependent on locally produced medicines that are now no longer obtainable, and the reported shortages could have catastrophic results.

Urgently needed medicines identified by the World Health Organization and the Syrian Ministry of Health include those for tuberculosis, hepatitis, and other chronic health conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, thalassemia and cancer, as well as medicines for kidney disease. There is also an urgent need for chemical reagents for blood screening tests to ensure the safety and quality of blood used in surgical and trauma care in hospitals.

Since the beginning of the unrest, the World Health Organization has been working with the Ministry of Health, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and partners to address the acute and chronic health needs of Syrian populations affected by the crisis. This included the provision of ambulances, the refurbishing and equipping of four mobile health clinics, and medicines and medical supplies for treating approximately 700 000 people.

As the crisis continues, the World Health Organization calls on all parties in Syria to take responsibility for protecting patients, health staff and facilities, and calls on the international community for urgent support to cover the critical gaps in medicines inside Syria.

With more than 120,000 registered displaced Syrians currently temporarily located outside the country, and thousands more still pending registration, the World Health Organization is calling on the international community to extend its support to the neighboring countries of Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq to ensure the availability of essential health care services and maintenance of the high cost of medical care for hospital-based health conditions such as palliative care for cancer and other complicated trauma cases.

To cover the critical gap in health needs inside Syria until the end of 2012, the World Health Organization is calling for immediate contributions totaling US\$ 21 million, of which the amount requested for medicines and medical supplies is approximately US\$ 17.5 million.

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