

18 December, 2013 — The Ministries of Health of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government, together with WHO, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other health partners launched Iraq's national acceleration plan for maternal and child health on 17 December 2013.

The 3-year acceleration plan delineates cost-effective interventions to be implemented in nine high-burden governorates of Iraq, in line with commitments expressed in the Dubai Declaration, adopted in January 2013. Iraq has made significant progress towards reduction of maternal mortality and if the same trend continues it will be able to achieve the targets set for Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 5 by 2015. However, the country will need to exert more intensive efforts in order to make a significant reduction in under-5 mortality and achieve the targets set for MDG 4.

The high-level gathering, led by the Senior Deputy Minister of Health Dr Issam Nameq, brought together officials from the Government, academia, representatives of the health and environment committee of the Iraqi parliament, representatives of civil society, WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, as well as the country's diplomatic community, to highlight their commitment to investing resources and working towards successful implementation of the plan.

WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Ala Alwan, together with the country representatives of UNFPA and UNICEF, reaffirmed their commitment as they presented the plan which has been developed to accelerate the implementation of evidence-based cost-effective priority health interventions along the continuum of care to improve the health of women and children. The selected interventions represent the most effective interventions and conform to the priorities articulated in the Ministry of Health's National Health Strategy for 2013—2017.

The 3-year plan was developed after reviewing the evidence generated by various surveys, assessments and the annual statistical reports of the Ministry of Health; a process technically supported by WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA. Priority has been given to those governorates and health districts which have had low coverage of key indicators, especially pertaining to maternal and child health.

The workplan will cover a number of priority areas and aims to improve access to, and quality

of, maternal and child health services, enhance the capacity of various cadres of health professionals, establish neonatal surveillance and further strengthen the maternal surveillance system, and raise the awareness of communities of maternal and child health by engaging civil society and parliamentarians in order to ensure the provision of more effective and equitable health services to those populations in greatest need.

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