31 January 2013, Dubai – Under the patronage of HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai, delegates at a United Nations-convened a high-level meeting on saving the lives of mothers and children in the Eastern Mediterranean Region today agreed to urgently accelerate progress on improving maternal and child health between now and the end of 2015. Delegates also committed to reduce the gap between current funding levels and those required if the Region is to meet Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 on reducing maternal and child mortality.

The meeting was attended and addressed by UN Messenger of Peace and Chairperson of Dubai Healthcare City Authority, HRH Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, wife of HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai, in the presence of HE Abdul Rahman Mohamed Al Oweis, Minister of Culture, Youth and Community Development and Acting Minister of Health, and HE Essa Al Maidoor, Director General of the Dubai Health Authority.

"The hard truth is that in this Region, around 39 000 women die as a result of pregnancy-related complications and around 923 000 children under five die of avoidable causes every year," said HRH Princess Haya. "Our development as a region, as individual nations and communities, is dependent on our ability to nurture our children, to give them the best we have to offer, and to ensure they have equal access to education, to health, and to ensure they grow into healthy mothers and fathers, and ultimately, healthy citizens."

The delegates' commitments are laid out in the Dubai Declaration, "Saving the lives of Mothers and Children, Rising to the Challenge", which details seven key concrete actions to be taken by all countries in the region to enable more women and children to access the health services they need.

Countries agreed to develop and execute national plans for maternal and child health; to take measurable steps to strengthen their health systems and address local bottlenecks; to mobilize domestic and international resources to establish sustainable financing mechanisms. They also agreed to improve coordination and accountability between all partners and promote cooperation between countries within the region; to address social and environmental determinants of maternal and child health, such as poverty, gender, water and sanitation, nutrition, and education, and to monitor progress through a regional commission on women's adolescents' and children's health. They noted the critical need to address the inequities that exist within and between countries, and the additional challenges posed in many countries by

humanitarian crises.

"WHO, UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund will work together across the Region to support countries in taking these commitments forward," said Dr Ala Alwan, Regional Director for the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, on behalf of the three agencies co-organizing the meeting. "This is the start of something new and important. As the Declaration emphasizes: we are determined to do our utmost to ensure that every woman has the best opportunity for a safe delivery, so that every child has the best possible start in life."

Making individual commitments on the final day of the meeting, countries not only pledgedto take action at home, but reiterated the importance of demonstrating solidarity within the region, and sharing experiences. Many highlighted the wide diversity in resources and capacity that exists between countries. Some pointed to ongoing initiatives under which richer countries partner with poorer ones, including through technical assistance on the ground. Countries that had already received assistance, pledged, in turn, to support others.

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