Mogadishu, 7 May, 2020 – The WHO country office and the Delegation of the European Union (EU) to Somalia have joined hands under a new collaboration in the country to strengthen operational response activities for COVID-19. The new collaboration aims to accelerate support for the frontline work of WHO in combating COVID-19 in a seemingly vast country where transportation of vital medical supplies and personnel needed for rapid response to the outbreak remain a perpetual challenge owing to suspension of commercial and cargo flights and the lockdown, which has cut off the capital city from rest of the country.

In this challenging and testing time, WHO has been offered EU flights to airlift critical medical equipment and supplies from Mogadishu to its final destination in Kismayo, the capital of Jubaland state. The equipment and supplies were urgently needed in the state for its isolation centre and the transportation of COVID-19 samples collected from suspected patients.

On the morning of 3 May, the flight picked up and transported 750 kgs of vital hospital supplies and medical equipment, including emergency medicines for patient treatment, from Mogadishu to Kismayo. These supplies and medicines are part of the Interagency Emergency Health Kit (IEHK), which provides essential health care in emergency settings for up to 10 000 people over a 3-month period. Due to the intense medical needs of patients affected by COVID-19, these vital medical supplies, and in particular, the medicines airlifted for treatment of acute respiratory diseases will be used to treat up to 600 COVID-19 patients in Kismayo's Max Falka isolation facility, which will be opened in the coming week.

On return, the EU flight also picked up 29 samples from suspected cases of COVID-19 in Kismayo and before returning to Mogadishu, the EU flight also collected another 20 COVID-19 samples from Hargeisa, Somaliland. The EU flight then returned to Nairobi and all the 49 samples were handed over to WHO in Nairobi for sending these samples to the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) for testing.

In the current race to limit further spread of COVID-19 in Somalia, the EU's generous support has helped make an important difference in ensuring that suspected cases are tested rapidly and the public health measures are applied quickly thereby preventing transmission in the community. The EU's support in transporting vital medical equipment and supplies for treatment of COVID-19 patients will ensure that no patient dies of COVID-19 because of lack of critical medical supplies in hospitals in any part of the country.

This new collaboration between the EU and WHO in Somalia is the result of a recently established bilateral coordination mechanism for COVID-19 response, whereby the EU is, *inter alia* , providing logistical and flight support to WHO for transportation of critical equipment and medical supplies, shipment of COVID-19 samples and personnel in this time of locked down while WHO is providing technical support and advice to the European Delegation for COVID-19 related activities, such as risk communications and awareness-raising initiatives in the country, which are supported by the EU. The collaboration will ensure, on one hand, the vital medical supplies reach the front lines to shield medical workers and save lives, and on the other hand, will ensure that the EU-supported activities, which are mostly implemented by the NGOs and regional health authorities, align with WHO's strategic priorities for COVID-19 response. The European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operation (ECHO) of the European Delegation has also contributed funding support to respond to the emergency response appeal of the country office for its work on COVID-19.

Commenting on this successful collaboration, Dr Mamunur Rahman Malik, WHO Representative said "We have started a new collaboration with EU in this country as we continue to fight hard with a common enemy which is affecting humanity at greater speed than ever. The scale of this crisis demands an extraordinary response, a response that is bigger than the magnitude of this crisis. This coordination and solidarity at national level proves that we all need to stick together to get over this crisis together. We are not safe until everyone is safe".

The new partnership between WHO and the EU delegation will help increase resilience to reduce the health and social impact of COVID-19 and all other future health emergencies in the country by protecting the vulnerable and keeping the country safe.

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