25 September 2023 – 2023 has been unique in many ways. In May, WHO declared that COVID-19 was no longer a public health emergency of international concern. It remains a threat. Scientists continue to detect new strains and subvariants in circulation.

But it is now one issue among many, to be managed alongside other infectious diseases and other health challenges. We must stay vigilant and never let our guard down.

The 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean – also known as RC70 – will take place between 9 and 12 October under the slogan “United for a healthier future”. It coincides with global celebrations of the 75th anniversary of WHO, and with the conclusion of my own five-year term as Regional Director.

A report on WHO’s work in the Region over the past five years will be presented to the Regional Committee. It documents the tremendous, tireless work carried out by our countries and territories, partners and the Regional Office to achieve the strategic priorities of WHO’s vision for the Region, Vision 2023: to expand access to universal health coverage, address the challenge of emergencies, promote the health and well-being of people in every country and territory of the Region, and change the way WHO itself operates.

Achieving all four of those priorities is essential to realize our ultimate goal of Health for All by All.

I am pleased to say that the report includes many examples of progress. Despite many challenges, we were able to seize opportunities to improve health and well-being across the

Region, making use of important policy instruments and initiatives introduced by the Regional Committee with high-level support from leaders in the Region.

As I prepare to step down, my successor will be nominated by the Regional Committee. I would like to take the opportunity now to wish the new Regional Director every success in the post.

Our Region is home to almost 745 million people. Along with some of the world's highest-income countries, the Region contains a number of fragile states. Eleven of our 22 countries and territories have experienced conflict in recent years. The social and economic upheaval and mass population displacements that result also affect other countries.

The agenda for RC70 highlights several public health issues that are of concern across our very diverse Region, but with a strong focus on emergency preparedness and response. At the heart of discussions are four technical papers on: integrating care for noncommunicable diseases in emergency settings in light of lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic; strengthening public health readiness for mass gatherings in the Region; strengthening and developing the Region's health workforce based on the pandemic experience; and galvanizing action to address the links between health and climate change.

Colleagues,

I invite you to visit the RC70 website to view technical papers and other RC documents including, among others, the provisional agenda and progress reports on a wide range of health issues that featured in resolutions from previous sessions of the Regional Committee.

RC70 will also include numerous events and activities, including panel discussions on the Regional Health Alliance and youth health and well-being in the Region.

To mark the 75th anniversary of WHO, a photo exhibition of success stories and significant health initiatives from the Region will be on display both in the Regional Office and online.

And as promoting physical activity and sport for health is a high priority, we invite you to join our “Walk the talk” event in Child’s Park, opposite the Regional Office, to kick off RC70.

I look forward to seeing you all there.

Related link

Advancing health for all by all. Report on the implementation of *Vision 2023* for the Eastern Mediterranean Region

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