1 October 2023, Cairo, Egypt – Today, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, met with His Excellency Mr Oka Hiroshi, Ambassador of Japan to Egypt, to affirm the continued cooperation between WHO and Japan in responding to health crises across the Region.

The Eastern Mediterranean Region faces myriad health crises. WHO acknowledges the significant support from the Government of Japan, which has greatly contributed to improving the health and well-being of millions of people in need.

“We deeply value the generous support provided by our long-standing donor, the Government of Japan, to countries and territories of the Eastern Mediterranean Region,” said Dr Al-Mandhari. “This enduring partnership has yielded significant advances in health care across the Region, bolstering the Region’s resilience to various health challenges.”

The Region is no stranger to crises, with a number of countries facing natural and man-made emergencies. The Region has the highest number of people in need and the highest number of displaced people of any WHO region. It is also highly vulnerable to the public health impacts of climate change, making the need for continued support even more pressing. The Government of Japan’s support has contributed to save lives, alleviate suffering and respond to the urgent needs of affected populations in the Region.

WHO not only responds to multiple large-scale emergencies and disease outbreaks but also works on enhancing the humanitarian–development nexus at the same time. WHO seeks to implement the nexus approach through sustainable interventions such as health systems strengthening and the expansion of universal health coverage and primary health care.

To date, the Government of Japan has made voluntary contributions to the Region totalling US$ 150 million from 2016 to 2023. This funding has primarily supported emergency and disease outbreak response efforts. It has also been directed to priority areas for Japan's support to WHO, including global health security, universal health coverage, antimicrobial resistance, tuberculosis, ageing and nutrition.

Japan's contribution was instrumental in enhancing the regional response to the COVID-19 emergency, both by reinforcing preparedness efforts and bolstering national capabilities in various critical areas. The support helped to strengthen the life-saving capacity of health professionals and health facilities and improve laboratory diagnosis, surveillance systems and the effectiveness of rapid response teams. The partnership has also contributed to facilitate advances in clinical management, particularly in the establishment and operation of critical care and intensive care units, and to enhance disease surveillance mechanisms, collectively contributing to a more resilient health infrastructure.

"Even after the COVID-19 pandemic was brought under control, the Eastern Mediterranean Region includes areas that suffer from outbreaks of other diseases, fuelled by conflict and instability. The contribution made by the Government of Japan testifies to its commitment to support the building of health systems resilient to health emergencies as part of our efforts to achieve universal health coverage," said Ambassador Oka.

In 2022 and 2023 alone, Japan contributed US$ 46.5 million to the Region, with 74% of these contributions (equivalent to US$ 34.4 million) directed toward supporting outbreak and crisis response efforts. Support to strengthen universal health coverage and health systems received 14% of the total mobilized funds (US$ 6.5 million). Countries benefiting from Japan's support include Afghanistan, Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen and others.

"WHO remains committed to responding to health needs in emergencies, strengthening health systems and health security, and expanding universal health coverage and primary health care. In line with our regional vision of Health for All by All, the partnership with the Government of Japan is pivotal to achieving these goals," said Dr Al-Mandhari.

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