Statement by Dr Hanan Balkhy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean

26 March 2024– On behalf of the World Health Organization, it is with profound sorrow that we announce the tragic loss of one of our dedicated team members, Engineer Emad Shehab, in Deir-ez-Zor City, Syria, who lost his life in the early hours of Tuesday morning when his building was struck during a series of airstrikes across the Governorate. We extend our deepest condolences to Eng. Shehab's family, friends, and colleagues during this difficult time.

Eng. Shehab, 42, served as a WHO focal point for water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in Deir-ez-Zor since 2022. He was a highly skilled professional who brought unwavering commitment and expertise to his role. His contributions to improving WASH conditions in health facilities, particularly his pivotal role in renovating the sewage system at Al Assad Public Hospital, were invaluable. His work on water quality testing in Deir-ez-Zor – located directly along the Euphrates River – was a critical part of outbreak detection and early response, including the cholera outbreak in Syria. Colleagues remember Eng. Shehab as tremendously dedicated to this work – spending hours in the field, often under challenging circumstances, and even occasionally hand-carrying water samples to central laboratories when necessary to ensure timely testing.

Eng. Shehab earned his bachelor's degree in Architectural Engineering from Aleppo University.

Prior to working with WHO, he had extensive experience in engineering and project management working with FAO, WFP, UNICEF, and a number of NGOs, overseeing various construction and rehabilitation projects, many of them related to water stations and sanitation facilities.

Eng. Shehab’s untimely passing marks not only a great loss for his loved ones, but is a stark reminder of the ongoing violence and suffering endured by the people of Syria. His legacy of service and compassion will be remembered fondly by all who had the privilege of working alongside him. As we mourn his loss, we reaffirm our commitment to supporting the health and well-being of the people of Syria, and we honor Eng. Shehab’s memory by continuing the vital work to which he dedicated his life. He is survived by his wife and two young children living in Damascus.

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