4 October 2023 – This briefing bridges two crucial events at which decision-makers converge. The first is the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly, which I attended last month and where world leaders renewed their commitment, action, and solidarity to fight pandemic threats and to advance universal health coverage.

The second is the annual meeting of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, which will take place next week. Members of the Regional Committee will convene to review progress on our collective commitments to health across the Region and to agree on priorities for the coming months and years.

The Eastern Mediterranean Region faces an unprecedented number of health emergencies. These are driven by state fragility and conflict, climate change-related extreme weather events, other natural and technological disasters, mass displacement and economic disparities.

By mid-2023, over 363 million people globally and 140 million in our Region alone required humanitarian aid, including for health. Recent emergencies, including Libya’s catastrophic floods and the ongoing armed conflict in Sudan will certainly increase this number.

Protracted armed conflicts have ravaged nine of the Region’s 22 countries and territories, resulting in increased trauma, displacement, and attacks on health care. Compounding this, our Region is the epicentre of 55% of the world’s refugees, putting even further strain in already weakened health systems.

The impact of climate change in our Region cannot be overstated. In 2022 and 2023, we

experienced five of the world's 10 most significant natural disasters, including drought, massive flooding, and earthquakes.

Disease outbreaks, including the resurgence of previously eliminated diseases, are on the rise. So far in 2023, the Region has documented 63 disease outbreaks – each of which causes avoidable morbidity and mortality.

Despite the severity of these emergencies, and the risk of compound disasters, severe funding shortfalls hamper our response.

Nearly six months on from the outbreak of war in Sudan, 70% of the country's hospitals are nonfunctional and malnutrition levels are soaring.

Libya faced a catastrophe in the wake of Storm Daniel, with deadly floods killing and injuring thousands of people, displacing tens of thousands more and disrupting health services. WHO is scaling up its response to the emerging health needs. My colleague Hala Khudari, from the WHO Libya Country Office, joins us today to provide an update on the situation.

Yemen, often overlooked by the world, remains in distress. Millions of people require health assistance, with health facilities functioning only on a limited basis and dire malnutrition rates among children and pregnant women.

In Afghanistan, underfunding threatens access to essential health services, particularly for women and children.

In Somalia, drought, disease outbreaks and insecurity have affected millions of people. WHO and partners work tirelessly in challenging circumstances to respond to multiple emergencies in the country.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, without sufficient funding by the end of 2023, trauma consultations

are at risk, as are vital vaccinations for children under 5 years of age.

These crises cause unnecessary suffering and preventable loss of life. We must take decisive action to save lives now and build resilient health systems for the future.

Access to quality health care is a basic human right, not a privilege. Our regional vision of Health for All by All envisages a time when that right is realized, for everyone in the Region. Through collective efforts, we can ensure a healthier, more equitable world.

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