
WHO Meet Ends with Commitment to Ensure Rights to Life and Health



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The 71st session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean hosted by Qatar from October 14 to 17, concluded with commitment by all Member States to work together to ensure that every single person in the region can enjoy their fundamental human rights to life and health no matter their location, nationality, economic or social affiliation.

Speaking at a press conference on Thursday, Dr Hanan Balkhy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, said: ‘We have enjoyed exceptionally rich and productive discussions throughout the past four days’. The Regional Committee session was held against the backdrop of emergencies that unfortunately affect half of the countries of the region. We are all acutely aware that precious lives are being lost every minute.”

She thanked Qatar for the excellent organization and generous hospitality accorded to representatives of 22 regional countries which participated in the event. She also thanked the ministers of health, heads of delegations and delegates for their dedications, wisdom and knowledge.

Dr Balkhy said that from the 12-month war in the Gaza Strip to conflicts in Lebanon, Sudan and Yemen and prolonged crises in Afghanistan, Somalia and other countries, the region is facing unimaginable and unacceptable tragedy and suffering.

She said the theme of the session, ‘Health Beyond Borders’, reflected the strong commitment of all member states to work together to ensure that every single person in the region can enjoy their fundamental human rights to life and health no matter their location, nationality, economic or social affiliation.

“Naturally, much of our time was spent discussing emergencies and other challenges, but we were also able to celebrate numerous successes in every country, and across many different areas of public health – from the tremendous growth of our regional Healthy Cities programme to some world-beating achievements in tackling communicable diseases such as hepatitis C, leprosy and malaria,” she added.

Dr Balkhy said that this was her first Regional Committee since she took over as Regional Director in February. She presented WHO’s major strategic plans including a new regional strategic operational plan and three flagships initiatives.

The strategic operational plan will help to accelerate progress in three critical areas: expanding access to essential medicines, vaccines and medical products; investing to improve the production, employment and retention of health workforce in the Region; and stepping up public health action on substance use.