

**Partnerships essential to thwart slowing TB control progress:
Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office of WHO**

24th March 2008-Cairo.

The Global Caution-Amid warnings on slowing pace of the progress to control the tuberculosis (TB) epidemic as per latest data available, WHO has cautioned the world community to scale up public sector interventions and encourage more investments in largely untapped areas like private sector service providers and non governmental organizations to detect and treat more TB patients on the eve of World TB Day, the 24th of March. According to a media release, The annual 6% average rate increase in new case detection (detecting new patients of tuberculosis) went down to 3%. The sluggish pace has been attributed to slow progress by some national programmes losing on their previous progress, no increase in case detection by most of the African countries and number of patients treated by private sector providers, and by non-governmental, faith-based and community organizations, thus escaping detection by the public programmes.

The Eastern Mediterranean Response-“The situation needs a more concerted response by adopting a multi sectoral approach which emphasizes on strengthening the capacity of national programmes and actively developing new and streamlining the existing investments in other service providers” said Dr. Hussein A. Gezairy, the Regional Director for Eastern Mediterranean (EMR) office of WHO. Dr Gezairy said that the Region has reported improved case detection and success rates in previous years, some countries have performed well and others are improving their performance. However, a lot needs to be done; the average case detection in the Region is 53% against the global target of 70% as per Millennium Development Goals, essentially not the desired. He stressed on the demand for a collective wisdom of stakeholders i.e. governments, private sector, civil society, media and donor agencies in the form of partnerships.

The Eastern Mediterranean of WHO is home to 22 countries namely Afghanistan, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. EMR contributes approximately 6% of the estimated and notified cases of tuberculosis across the world. Tuberculosis or TB, a totally preventable and curable disease causes 110,000 deaths across the region, nearly 300 people every day. A disease with common symptoms prolonged cough, weight loss, persistent fever and blood in sputum could be treated in 6-8 months period with Directly Observed Treatment Short Course (DOTS) Therapy, introduced by WHO in 1990s. Impressive progress has been made by EMR countries in expanding DOTS facilities and now TB diagnosis and treatment is either very cheap or absolutely free.

The Launch of Eastern Mediterranean Stop TB Partnership: The Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr Gezairy said will be launching the Eastern Mediterranean Stop TB Partnership this year, a long awaited venture and much needed step. The proposed Partnership, he said is envisioned, to be a promise of governments, civil society, media, corporate and private sector to work together and

make the Region TB Free ultimately. Dr Gezairy said that slow progress in TB diagnosis and treatment could be fuelled by multi drug resistance (MDR-TB, a complicated form of Tuberculosis) which according to WHO estimates has reached the highest levels ever recorded and threatening TB & HIV combination. He said that a Regional Partnership is necessary to bridge the funding gaps with flat TB budget projections in most of the countries in near future.

The TB Day in the Eastern Mediterranean: The global theme for World TB Day 2008 is “***I Am Stopping TB*** “أقوم بدوري في دحر السل”. The Eastern Mediterranean Region acknowledges the Day as the Day to honor the lives and stories of people affected by TB: women, men and children who have fought TB; nurses; doctors; researchers; community workers—numerous others who have contributed towards the fight against TB. The theme, the media release stressed, emphasizes on the need to recognize the importance of each one of the partners, calls for capitalizing on the diversity, strengthening bonds through similarities and aiming for a better tomorrow. It advocates for each one of the 22 countries of the Region as committed to stopping TB through a joint, effective and strong collaborative partnership with one voice and one mission “*I am stopping TB*”.