Oslo, 24 February 2017 - The crisis in the Lake Chad Region is a public health crisis “with rates of death, malnutrition and disease rarely seen over the past 20 years,” Dr Rick Brennan, WHO Director of Emergency Operations told the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region today.

A lack of qualified health workers and essential medicines, and the destruction of medical facilities are hampering the delivery of lifesaving health care in the region. In addition, widespread food insecurity and malnutrition are associated with severe health consequences for affected populations. “Between malnutrition and death, there is always disease,” said Dr Brennan.

“Malnutrition lowers the body’s capacity to fight infection,” Dr Brennan explained. “A malnourished child is far more prone to contract an infectious disease such as pneumonia, diarrhoea and measles – and then to die from that disease.”

Progress has been made where local responders, WHO and health sector partners have been able to gain access. However, the situation remains grave. “We are doing what we can, where we can, with the limited resources we have.”

But in 2016, said Dr Brennan, the health sector only received 32% of all requested funds across the region. In 2017, the sector has collectively appealed for US$125 million for the region. “We can only hope that an appropriate portion of the pledges committed today will be directed to health partners,” Dr Brennan concluded.