Baghdad, 16 June 2016: WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Ala Alwan arrived in Baghdad today to review firsthand WHO's response to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Fallujah city, where more than 42 000 Iraqis have been displaced since the beginning of the military operations in the city in May 2016. Tens of thousands of besieged and displaced men, women, children and older people face major health risks as they lack adequate access to health services.

"The health situation inside and around Fallujah is deeply worrying," said Dr Alwan. "We are concerned about the low immunity status of children as no immunization services have been possible for the past 2 years. The low level of immunity coupled with poor hygiene conditions raises the risk of disease outbreaks, such as measles. Additionally, it is estimated that hundreds of pregnant women are trapped in Fallujah and are in urgent need of reproductive health services," Dr Alwan added.

The Regional Director met with high-level Iraqi officials to discuss the health needs of displaced persons, as well as those who remain trapped inside Fallujah, 60 km west of Baghdad. "The situation is extremely difficult and complex. Additional resources are required to provide urgent health assistance to thousands of families. WHO is disappointed by the inadequate levels of funding for the health sector, which is a major impediment to the response," Dr Alwan concluded. Residents of Fallujah have been facing acute shortages of food, medicine and other basic needs as the city has been inaccessible to humanitarian actors.

WHO has established a new primary health care centre with a local partner in Amiriyat Al Fallujah to serve the internally displaced population, including the recently arrived families estimated at nearly 3250 families (19 500 persons) living in 5 camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 5 informal settlements around the Bzibiz area. 4 additional camps of 250 tents capacity each are currently under construction in the Region to host more families from Al-Fallujah.

WHO has also supported the Ministry of Health and partners with 15 tonnes of medicines, medical supplies and emergency kits to respond to most urgent health needs of civilians moving out of Fallujah to IDP camps in Ramadi, Khalidiya, and Amiriyat Al Fallujah areas. These shipments include a wide range of life-saving medicines for acute and chronic diseases, trauma kits and surgical supplies.

8 WHO mobile medical clinics continue to provide urgently needed health services in Al-Anbar

governorate; 3 of which were deployed to provide these services in Al Fallujah IDP camps located in the Amiriyat Al Fallujah area.

To detect and respond to any potential disease outbreaks, WHO is operating 13 disease early warning sites in Al-Anbar governorate and has provided health care providers with training on disease reporting and tablets to document and report possible outbreaks.

Despite the projected increase in humanitarian health needs in and around Fallujah, WHO, in coordination with other humanitarian organizations and health cluster partners, will do its utmost to coordinate and support humanitarian health response efforts. “The challenge is immense and we must be ready to stand together in responding to people’s health needs,” noted Dr Alwan.

http://www.emro.who.int/media/news/who-expresses-concern-over-disease-outbreaks-fallujah.html