06 January 2012 | Geneva - The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), whose Ministers of Health met in Muscat, Oman earlier this week, is the first regional entity to respond, at a Heads of State level, to the UN General Assembly Political Declaration on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) by developing a regional strategy to address diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and chronic respiratory disease.

The strategy outlines a plan to put the commitments agreed upon in September in the UN General Assembly's Political Declaration on NCDs into action. NCDs cause more than 60% of all deaths in GCC countries, and are caused by shared risk factors like tobacco use, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity.

"The regional strategy details what the six countries [1] will be doing to tackle NCDs during the next years in terms of reducing people's exposure to causative risk factors and improving services to prevent and treat these leading health problems," said Dr Ahmed Al Saidi, Omani Minister of Health who chaired the meeting. "It also highlights what the six countries will do to set targets and measure results, advance multisectoral action, and strengthen national capacity."

The Oman meeting followed a two-day summit in December where Heads of State of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf endorsed a regional approach to reduce premature deaths from noncommunicable diseases.

Welcoming the announcement, World Health Organization Regional Director-Elect of WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region Dr Ala Alwan said, "We have the knowledge of what works to prevent and treat NCDs, a global public health and development problem of increasing significance to many countries. We are pleased to see the Gulf Cooperation Council countries taking concrete action to implement affordable best practices -- called "best buys" – to curb NCDs and we hope other regions will take similar action."

"Up to 50% of people dying from these diseases in some of the Gulf countries, die prematurely, before the age of 60 years. This initiative by the GCC should be a major landmark in stopping these premature deaths," said Alwan.

For more information on noncommunicable diseases:

http://www.who.int/ncd
http://www.who.int/topics/chronic_diseases/en/
http://www.who.int/chp/ncd_global_status_report/en/index.html
http://www.who.int/nmh/events/un_ncd_summit2011/en/index.html