

**Statement of I.R. Iran on  
“Strengthening public health readiness for mass gatherings events in the Eastern  
Mediterranean Region”**

**Mr./Madam Chairperson,  
Excellences, ladies and gentlemen**

We appreciate the secretariat for organizing this technical paper that is professionally organized. The EMR hosts some of the world’s largest religious mass gatherings (MGs) including Haj and Arba’een every year. Such events potentially increase the burden of health systems through a variety of public health risks e.g. escalation of communicable diseases due to close contacts, exacerbated NCDs due to environmental and host factors, extreme climatic and heat-related illnesses, traumas, etc. However, in case of sound preparedness and response planning, MGs can enhance public health readiness during the events and conclude with sustainable capacities and more resilient health systems in the long run. In order to come up with a better planning for MGs, we would like to highlight some strategic provisions in the paper as such:

1. A systematic and continuous risk assessment is vital for advance planning and safe delivery of MGs. To this end, I.R. Iran has developed a domestic cross-border risk assessment tool after the last G5 event in Tehran in May 2023, which can be used during MGs such as Arba’een.
2. Multisectoral planning is of utmost importance due to necessity of substantial coordination and collaboration between various stakeholders including public health, hospital sector, security, event organizers, transportation, PoEs, emergency services, etc. The magnitude of potential health hazards during MGs, necessitates that such preparedness and response plans for MGs to be of an all-hazard nature.

Recently, in the 2022 annual report of WHO pandemic influenza preparedness framework, the multi-hazard pandemic preparedness and response planning (PPPR) of I.R. Iran for COVID-19 and influenza pandemics as well as epidemics of acute respiratory nature was recognized as a best practice. We would like to benefit that health emergency framework to integrate mass gathering due to some features including its proximity to become an all-hazard plan, its multi-sectoral and whole-of-government nature, incorporation of lessons learned from COVID-19 pandemic, and classifying actions in different phases such interpandemic, alert, pandemic and recovery is very close to WHO/EMRO recommendations to categorize actions in a MG framework in pre-event, during-the-event, and post-event phases. Also, the PPPR has developed 10 strategic areas (pillars) very similar to those which WHO/EMRO has suggested in the regional framework to strengthen MG readiness in the region such as risk assessment, PoEs, Surveillance with EWAR function, cross-border collaboration, research agenda, RCCE. Due to the above-mentioned proximities, we request WHO support to Iran’s MOH&ME for next steps of the mentioned planning process such as making policy briefs, advocacy of high-level authorities, SimEx, endorsement of the plan, and finally fund raising for implementation of some activities of its operational plan by international/regional partners.

We believe by taking such an approach and organized planning process, I.R. Iran can leverage its PPPR into materializing the regional MG framework, reach to sustainable capacities and more resilient health system. We welcome some visitors from G5 countries or other interested MSs to be invited and observe the next steps of planning process of integration I.R. Iran's PPPR with MG via WHO support to exchange experiences.

**Madam/Mr. chair, thank you for the floor.**

**Deputy for Public Health  
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