



International Atomic Energy Agency
IAEA statement to the WHO Regional Committee
for the Eastern Mediterranean
10-13 October 2022

Honourable Ministers,

Dear Chair,

Distinguished delegates,

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is mandated to accelerate and enlarge the safe, peaceful and secure application of nuclear science and technology to promote sustainable development, including in the field of health.

To deliver on this mandate, the IAEA works to strengthen national capacity in Member States to apply nuclear science and technology for the diagnosis and treatment of a wide range of diseases.

Cancer is a global crisis, hitting low- and middle-income countries particularly hard. Rays of Hope, an IAEA flagship initiative, is supporting countries in building capacity to address this issue through the establishment and scaling up of cancer diagnostic and radiotherapy centres.

The IAEA works closely with the WHO Regional Office and Country Offices on non-communicable diseases, including cancer. Cancer is a priority health issue in the Eastern Mediterranean; it is the fourth leading cause of death in the region. Together with WHO and the International Agency for Research on Cancer

(IARC), the IAEA helps Member States to develop comprehensive cancer control programmes, by assisting them to assess their needs and formulate evidence-based policies and programmes in response. Recently, the IAEA completed cancer control needs assessment (called impACT Review) in Iraq and Syria; similar work is starting shortly in Jordan.

IAEA work to address cancer complements the work of WHO. For example, a new IAEA project launched in 2022 aims to improve paediatric cancer care and outcomes in low- and middle-income countries. The new project is aligned with Member States' plans for strengthening cancer services using nuclear techniques and with the WHO Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer. Its goals will be achieved by enhancing medical imaging diagnosis, radiotherapy treatment and nutritional support.

The IAEA pays particular attention to the training of cancer care professionals, and to supporting and encouraging scientific research through Coordinated Research Projects with Member States. To increase regional capacity for training and research, the IAEA identifies collaborating centres in Member States. This year, we signed a Collaborating Centre agreement with Jordan's King Hussein Cancer Centre, KHCC. In addition, the IAEA promotes quality assurance and quality control of radiation medicine, which is essential for the delivery of safe and effective treatment to cancer patients. In 2022 we conducted an international training course on Quality Assurance Teams for Radiation Oncology (QUATRO), where teams of radiotherapy professionals from Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia were trained in quality management of radiation oncology.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The IAEA prioritises partnerships to improve health in the Eastern Mediterranean. We have forged, and continue to seek, new partnerships, both traditional and non-traditional, with partners who share our mission and values. Our goal is to work

with partners to support Member States in delivering the 2030 Agenda. For instance, the IAEA has helped secure the donation of an advanced radiotherapy machine and a state-of-the-art SPECT-CT machine for the Al-Basheer hospital in Amman, Jordan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the IAEA provided essential support to Member States by delivering RT-PCR diagnostic kits and related equipment to 306 laboratories in 130 countries and territories. WHO and IAEA produced the joint ‘COVID-19 Technical specifications for imaging devices: portable ultrasound; mobile radiographic digital equipment; computed tomography (CT) scanning system’ to enable and strengthen procurement practices in countries. Jointly, we have provided capacity building through a webinar series for laboratories that have received PCR-RT equipment and kits from the IAEA, as well as for WHO accredited laboratories.

Our assistance did not stop at this point. The IAEA looked ahead and, in June 2021, launched Zoonotic Disease Integrated Action (ZODIAC) to strengthen Member State capacities to prepare for and respond to any future outbreaks of zoonotic disease.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The IAEA is a committed partner of the World Health Organization, and is determined to continue supporting WHO’s noble mission of promoting and improving access to universal healthcare in the Eastern Mediterranean region and the whole world.

Thank you.