

Statement to the Fifty-fourth session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean by Health Action International

Health Action International congratulates countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region who have conducted medicine price surveys using the tool we co-developed with the World Health Organization. From the evidence gathered in this region, and across the globe, it is clear that medicine price, availability and affordability issues cut across all diseases, all nations, and affect all people. But in particular, it is the poor who are paying the price of inadequate pricing policies – paying the price both financially and with their health

You now have the evidence – government purchasing of high priced branded products, poor availability of medicines in public sector dispensaries, high prices in private retail pharmacies, taxing of essential medicines, excessive mark-ups - and most crucially, large sectors of the population who simply are unable to afford the treatment they need. Having to work over a week for a month's therapy is simply too great a burden. Clearly many people are spiraling into debt or going without the medicines they need.

The challenge is now to respond to these findings – to develop, implement and enforce medicine pricing policies and programmes that result in medicines that are both available and are affordable. Some countries in this region have developed evidence-based pricing policies; others are in the process. But more has to be done. You have mentioned a number of policy options in your discussion – think clearly about the pros and cons of each then act to develop, implement and enforce those that best fit your country situation.

Just as Health Action International provided technical expertise in conducting your price surveys, so too do we offer support in developing national pricing policies, and establishing systems to monitor the affect of these policies. We believe that through the collaboration of government, civil society, WHO and others we can overcome the barrier of high prices and improve access to treatment.

We congratulate Dr Gezairy and his staff, in particular the regional pharmaceutical advisor Dr Zafar Mirza, for their commitment to improving treatment affordability. We believe that with their support, and the commitment shown by Ministers of Health, this region will be a model for the rest of the world on tackling medicine price issues. Your discussions today, and this important resolution, are a key step in this process.

We look forward to continuing our collaboration with WHO, and working with governments in the Eastern Mediterranean to develop policies and programmes that ensure medicines are affordable and available for all.