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# **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FOR THE HEALTH SECTOR AND COMMUNITIES: CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD**

**Expert Consultation**

**15 - 17 February 2006  
Room D, WHO Headquarters  
Geneva, Switzerland**

## **Background**

Drawing on experiences and lessons learnt from major crises in recent years and taking stock of the outcomes of the Kobe Conference on Disaster risk reduction, the World Health Assembly, at its 58<sup>th</sup> session, adopted resolution WHA 58.1.

This resolution urged Member States to make their best efforts to engage actively in the collective measures to establish global and regional preparedness plans that integrate risk reduction into the health sector and build up capacity to respond to health related crises. It also requested Member States to formulate national emergency-preparedness plans that give due attention to public health, including health infrastructure, and to the roles of the health sector in crises, in order to improve the effectiveness of responses to crises and contributions to the recovery of health systems. Member States may also work to improve existing mechanisms for health aspects of humanitarian assistance, including additional mechanisms and modalities for the rapid availability of resources in the event of an emergency or disaster.

Through its Department of Health Action in Crises and its network at regional and country levels, WHO has been working in the area of Emergency Preparedness and Response to better fulfill its primary role of providing technical assistance to countries in need. An institutional capacity strengthening programme was initiated in October 2004 and it is now being implemented in its second year.

As part of this initiative, a new strategy on reducing the impact of crises on people's health has been developed through a broad consultative process. WHO's capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from crises is also being enhanced by the recent restructuring which gives a higher priority to preparedness and capacity building.

Acknowledging the central role of community-based preparedness in increasing the resilience of populations at risk of disasters and in saving lives, a new group in charge of Emergency Preparedness and Capacity Building has been created in the new structure of

the Health Action in Crises (HAC) Department. The main objective of the above unit is to revitalize the Preparedness and Capacity Building component of WHO work in this area.

Through HAC at all levels, WHO intends to intensify and streamline its support to Member States in developing policies, delivering programmes and building partnerships that increase the capacity of the health sector at local and national levels to forecast risk, reduce vulnerabilities and take efficient precautionary measures against threats so that, when a crisis strikes, people and institutions can cope and respond conveniently, minimizing avoidable death and suffering.

In this respect, an informal expert consultation is being organized to review the overall public health issues in emergency preparedness, as well as regional and country experiences in promoting and supporting emergency preparedness and mitigation, and to identify existing gaps and priorities for future action.

The main expected outcome of the consultation will be a set of concrete, strategic and programmatic recommendations to WHO.

## **Objectives**

1. Review experiences in promoting and/or institutionalising emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction at regional and country level.
2. Identify existing gaps, major challenges and discuss approaches for tackling the main emergency preparedness and mitigation components, such as advocacy, information management, policy, capacity development, multisectoral action, sustained social mobilization, etc.
3. Propose recommendations and outline a global plan of work for intensifying WHO programmatic work and technical assistance to countries.

## **Main expected outcome**

- Recommendations on process and content for a global strategy for scaling-up emergency preparedness and mitigation activities in countries.
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