

Statement
delivered by
H.E. the Minister of Health and Social Solidarity
Mr. D. Avramopoulos
during the 60th Session of the World Health Assembly
15 May 2007

Mme President

Mrs. Director General

Dear colleagues,
Representatives of the participating States and Organizations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me, first of all, to congratulate Dr Margaret Chan for her appointment as Director General of WHO and express our conviction that she will provide a visionary leadership of the Organization. My congratulations go also to Dr Anarfi Asamoah-Baah for his appointment as Deputy Director General and I would like to wish him every success in his high mission.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Greece fully supports the statement made by Germany, the EU Presidency, on behalf of the European Union and its 27 member states on Health and Global Security, which is the focus of this year's World Health Assembly.

In our era of globalization, health is a global value and threats against health are also taking global dimensions, as is the case of AIDS, of SARS and recently of Avian Influenza. International Health Security is a concept of capital importance as Dr Chan pointed out in her speech.

Health is a significant component of development and global security. Threats to health may occur for a variety of reasons such as emerging diseases, humanitarian emergencies, bioterrorism, and environmental degradation including climate change. They may affect not only the economy of societies but also their social and political stability. Health, development and security have become interdependent. Long term national plans on development may be put at risk because of threats to health.

The notion of human security is the right of individuals, communities and societies to have a life free from fear.

This notion of human security includes health as one of its key factors. In these challenging and demanding times, only working together for health, we have the possibility to prevent outbreaks, minimize their impact and contribute significantly to human security. We must be on the alert and well prepared in order to protect nations and populations. It is in this spirit that Greece has participated for years in the Human Security Network and undertakes now its presidency, from Slovenia.

One of the major events of 2007 in the field of International Health is the entry into force next month of the new International Health Regulations. We express our satisfaction with the fact that a new and up-to-date instrument is now available to assist us in preventing and facing threats of epidemics. We also consider that the International Health Regulations can play an important role in further enhancing health security through the establishment of surveillance systems and rapid reaction mechanisms.

Greece is contributing for fighting HIV/AIDS through both the EU and the specialized agencies of U.N. System. Furthermore, Greek NGOs implement preventive, care, and treatment programmes in African countries.

There is no doubt that international health security greatly depends on the capability of the national health systems to react effectively to health threats. We must thus upgrade and strengthen our health systems. There are of course problems in addressing this essential issue, which remains among our primary concerns.

The focus on primary health care is an approach to the right direction.

The Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity of Greece is promoting bilateral relations in the health sector cooperating with countries in the region and all over the world.

At the same time we encourage the mutual exchange of know-how in many sectors, such as the control and prevention of infectious diseases and the strategy, planning and pharmaceutical treatment for the prevention of communicable diseases.

As regards the appearance of pandemics, our Ministry, following the recommendations of WHO and the European Union, has been motivated since March 2005, to prepare for the occurrence of an AVIAN FLU.

National and Operational Plans against an Influenza Pandemic have already been prepared.

All the hospitals of the country have organized preparedness exercises. Our country participated in the Pan European Influenza Pandemic Exercise in November 2005 and has proceeded to the provision of Individual Protection Measures.

Meanwhile, Greece was the first European country to summon, in November 2005, a Ministerial Conference of the Countries of the Black Sea and Cyprus, in the context of the South East Europe Cooperation Process, aiming at a common policy for those countries, which host a large number of migratory birds.

Furthermore, we give high priority to the following:

- Our commitment to counteract obesity and smoking,
- Our initiative to encourage voluntary action,
- Our commitment to address the problem of antibiotic resistance,
- The human rights and public health challenges of illegal migration, and finally,
- Urban health and the role of local governments in promoting health and sustainable development.

Health is a good and a human right of local and global dimensions and thus an important strategic point of legitimacy in international efforts to promote dialogue, democracy, the better understanding amongst cultures and the global commitment to peace and security.

In other words, we can promote the ideal of health diplomacy, since International Security and Health are interdependent.

Let us take advantage of these challenging and demanding circumstances to strengthen our solidarity and collaboration, to invest in health.

Together we must explore ways to make this planet a healthier place in favor of global security and sustainable development .

Let us work together to make this world better for our children and the generations to come.

Thank you very much for your attention