



## **WHA 69**

Technical Briefing “Migration and Health” – 27 May 2016

### **ITALY**

Director General, Regional Director, Authorities, Colleagues, friends, thank you for being here today.

Unfortunately, Minister Lorenzin had to respond to a last minute political call and was prevented to address her concern and commitment.

In the last two days our Navy rescued more than 9,000 migrants who were otherwise going to die in front of the Libyan coasts in 33 different operations. As for today only, we have 11 ships at sea carrying 4,000 people.

We are proud of what our people are doing.

Let me remind you that while the world mobilized to face the Ebola crisis, and WHO is now reforming its governance to re-establish its capacity and leadership in emergency management, thousands of lives are lost in the sea now, more than the estimated deaths from Ebola. While migrants coming from the Middle East and moving to central European countries are predominantly families and small communities, people crossing the sea are mainly individuals coming from a variety of countries, sometimes infiltrated by criminal organizations. The male proportion is decreasing in favor of females and unaccompanied children and teens, whose needs are even more challenging.

We are also proud to participate in this session, which brings together so many countries and so many interests, listening to our voices, as we cannot act alone and will not be able to continue our mission without global support.

We spent two years alone trying to stimulate the world’s attention. Today no one denies the challenge and all countries and agencies may finally decide to join forces. We are particularly grateful to WHO/EURO, and dr. Jakab personally, for her constant and qualified support and for the successful advocacy that led to the

Rome conference of November 2015, whose outputs are a policy and strategy draft and a plan of action endorsed by the SCRC/EURO last week.

In order to improve first aid and rescue at sea, we are working closely also with the International Organization for Migration on project PASSIM, aiming at identifying situations of vulnerability and need of care very rapidly, before arrival.

The documents generated by the constant collaboration between Italy and WHO aim at providing the required evidence and an impartial view based on technical and scientific knowledge, objectivity, the possibility to advocate for migrants' needs and expectations, overcoming the reluctance of a consistent number of States to accept the simple fact that migration is one of the leading forces shaping our century, and that it will not disappear and cannot be ignored.

The excellent collaboration with WHO will materialize in a resolution for the next September Regional Committee, and possibly in the updating of the resolution WHA 61.17, 2008, as we have pointed out during the general discussion this week.

As you know, our position is based on an explicit human rights approach, no matter whether we deal with refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, be they documented or not. We want to go beyond the constraints of an outdated and unnecessary classification, and consider them all victims and not perpetrators, deserving to be treated with compassion and humanity. Italy is a land of migrants, with 15 million Italian passport holders around the world and with 65 million second and third generation ethnic Italians, pairing the number of current residents: they all look at us and support our approach reflecting their past struggle for survival.

We acknowledge the different causes and triggers of migration, from criminal human trafficking (90%, worth 5.5 billion USD cashed yearly), to climate changes, from violence and war to droughts, poverty and a legitimate aspiration to improve life conditions. And we have no doubt that migrants must be provided with quality health services, as Italy does, from on-board screening and first aid to sophisticated hospital care on arrival to mainland. We have adopted the DG's mantra that no one, ever, must be left behind, and are practicing accordingly.

We are going now further on, with the migrants' compact that the Government of Italy has presented to the EU and to the African leaders who met in Rome ten days ago.

It is by means of concertation, coherence, solidarity and a common approach that we will succeed, as we do not want to see more dead children on a beach or floating in the sea.

We hope that our colleagues from WHO and from IOM, whose Rome office has been an extraordinary partner on several aspects of migration, will continue working together, with Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and other EU Member States, as well as with EMRO and AFRO.

We need all goodwill parties to advocate strongly and continue implementing concrete actions, as Italy is doing. In fact, our universalistic health system provides care not only to all ethnic Italians, but also to the hundred thousands who have landed and continue to land, in a spirit of equality and equity, following the WHO Venice office's guidelines. They believe in us and trust we can meet their hopes for a better and healthy future. On our side, we will continue advocating for their right to access unrestricted care and cure.

The quoted joint WHO/EURO-Italy programme PHAME and other collaborative work with IOM and HCR aim at assessing countries' capacities to do so, and facilitate the adoption of contingency plans allowing for the delivery of a full package of services.

I want to extend Minister Lorenzin's deep appreciation to Dr. Jakab's vision and more than friendly collaboration and to the DG's global perspective that have led us here today. May I conclude now with an appeal in favour of the symbol islands of Lampedusa and Lesbo, competing for the Nobel prize for peace. Five million Sicilians are constantly sharing their homes and their resources (and they are not the richest area in Italy or in Europe) in silence and respect, being an example to us and to the world.

May I finally acknowledge the bravery and dedication of the Ministry of Health border health offices' staff, supporting the regional health authority of Sicily, the Navy and the Coast Guard in their exceptional capacity to rescue lives.

Thank you for your kind attention and for what you will do with us next.