WHO AFRICAN REGION GETS ITS OWN STRATEGIC HEALTH OPERATIONS CENTRE

A Strategic Health Operations Centre, known simply as the AFRO SHOC Room, has been established at the Brazzaville headquarters of the WHO Regional Office for Africa.

The facility will serve as the hub for coordinating the response to outbreaks, epidemics, pandemics, natural or man-made disasters and other public health emergencies in the region.

“We are witnessing a very important moment for WHO in the African Region and for this office in particular”, WHO Regional Director for Africa, Dr Luis Sambo, said during the official commissioning ceremony which took place recently in Brazzaville.

“This state-of-the-art facility, complete with video and telephone conferencing facilities will ensure real-time communication with WHO Headquarters; other WHO regions; our Country Offices and Intercountry Support Teams (ISTs) at base locations in Libreville, Ouagadougou and Harare; partners, and other rapid response teams operating in the field,” Dr Sambo said.

He added: “The AFRO SHOC Room will revolutionize our ability to mount coordinated rapid responses, and to save lives more quickly.”

Built-in electronic storage systems in the AFRO SHOC will ensure storage of large volumes of epidemiological data as well as well as facilitate detailed analysis of these data.

Situated in a room on the first floor of AFRO’s headquarters in the Congolese capital, the AFRO SHOC is fitted with a dedicated VSAT communication system and satellite plasma television screens which receive dozens of TV channels in different languages, thus enhancing the collection, compilation, verification, risk assessment and monitoring of public health events that could threaten regional health security.

To support the process of outbreak detection, verification, risk assessment and monitoring, WHO has developed a web-based application called Event Management System (EMS) which uses the latest information technology and acts as an early warning and response system.

Management of the AFRO SHOC Room

The centre is managed by WHO AFRO’s Epidemic and Pandemic Alert and Response Programme whose primary mission is to support Member States of the African Region to establish and implement functional integrated early warning and epidemic preparedness and response systems that will result in the improved prediction, early detection and rapid and effective response to epidemic- and pandemic-prone diseases that will be the foundation of an integrated regional alert and response system for epidemics and other public health emergencies.

Functionality of the SHOC Room:

- Provide facilities for coordination of response to health emergencies within the region.
- Ability to access satellite television broadcasts on multiple touch screens.
- Ability to access political and geographical maps of the region’s 46 Member States, using sophisticated software able to zoom into specific locations (city, village or site as much as possible).
- Communication via e-mail telephone, fax, video, satellite phone, high frequency radio using one or the other as an alternative and backup.
- Ability to access video-conferencing facilities.
- Connection to situation rooms at HQ, regional and country offices as well as WHO AFRO’s ISTs.
- Ability to function 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

The AFRO SHOC boasts an equipment room, a main operations room, two outbreak rooms and a control room.