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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Africa to take the lead in Integrating Oral Health into Chronic Disease Programmes

Harare, ZIMBABWE, 25 September 2007 - Africa will be the first region of the world to take tangible action in integrating oral health into other chronic diseases programmes.

This was the key outcome of an expert consultation organized by the WHO Regional Office for Africa from 12 to 14 September in Harare, Zimbabwe. The meeting was attended by more than 20 participants including Chief Dental Officers from the African Region, experts from WHO Collaboration Centres, the FDI World Dental Federation and WHO Headquarters.

"The adoption of an integrated approach to oral health, based on a sound framework of indicators, will be important to ensure improvements in oral health throughout Africa" said Dr Charlotte Ndiaye, WHO Africa Regional Adviser for Oral Health. "This consultation has shown that particularly in resource poor settings the integration of oral health into the activities of other chronic disease programmes can be a realistic way of addressing urgent community needs. It is also a tangible way of acting upon the resolution on oral health, adopted at the World Health Assembly in May."

The experts discussed possibilities of implementing integrated activities in the context of child and maternal health, Integrated Management of Childhood Illness, school health, HIV/AIDS, traditional medicine, nutrition programmes and health education. The experts also outlined the need to propose guidelines for an integrated approach to oral health based on concrete actions to assist Member States in implementing the May 2007 World Health Assembly resolution on oral health.

Commented Dr Habib Benzian, Development and Public Health Manager of FDI World Dental Federation: "Health professionals will be at the center of an integrated approach to oral health. They need to be advocates and promoters of increased attention to oral health. There is a need for constant dialogue between dental professionals and their colleagues in the fields of nursing, pharmacy, medicine and community health. Only by working together can true integration, based on the concept and understanding of common risks, become a reality".

The recommendation of the expert consultation will form the basis of a report on the integrated approach to oral health that will be presented and discussed at the 58th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa to be held from 1 to 5 September 2008 in Cameroon.

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