

PRESS RELEASE

WHO's unique health emergency fund gets a boost from Timor-Leste

Dili, 8 September 2009: Timor-Leste, the South-East Asia Region's youngest nation, has announced that it will make a contribution to the World Health Organization's (WHO) unique million-dollar health emergency fund, whose fast and flexible disbursement mechanism has already allowed it to make a difference to more than 200 000 people affected by various humanitarian crises in the Region.

Timor-Leste's contribution of US\$10, 000 to the South-East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund (SEARHEF) will add to the fund's pool of US\$1 million provided by the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia.

"From our history, we have seen the difference that prompt support can make to the lives of the people in humanitarian situations. That is why, today, we would like to give something back to support health in emergencies," said Timor-Leste's Minister of Health, Dr Nelson Martins, currently in Kathmandu, Nepal, attending the annual South-East Asian Region's Health Ministers Meeting.

He added "It is a unique and important Fund that has already, since its inception, made a difference to the lives of those suffering humanitarian situations, in less than two years, since it was first used during Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in May 2008. We hope that it will continue to make a difference in emergencies in the Region."

Dr Paramita Sudharto, WHO representative to Timor-Leste said, "We are happy to receive this contribution from the Government of Timor-Leste. This shows that Timor-Leste is committed to global issues."

In a disaster, speedy assistance can make all the difference between life and death. Yet most emergency funding takes days to arrive. The South-East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund was launched in 2007 to bridge this gap. Its goal is to provide funds within 24 hours of a request from the Government following an emergency.

SEARHEF was first used following Cyclone Nargis which claimed over 130 000 lives in Myanmar in 2008. It has since been used to provide critical health needs in a number of emergencies, including the Kosi river floods in Nepal in 2008, and most recently, in the conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) separatist group which ended in May 2009.

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