

***Opening Remarks***

***By***  
***Dr Samlee Plianbangchang***  
***Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia***

***At***

***Regional High-level Consultation on Bloomberg Global  
Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use***

***WHO/SEARO, New Delhi***  
***22-23 February 2007***

# **Regional High-level Consultation on Bloomberg Global Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use**

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**DR SAMLEE PLAINBANGCHANG  
REGIONAL DIRECTOR, WHO SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

Distinguished Participants; Distinguished Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen;

With great pleasure I welcome you all to the Regional High-level Consultation on Bloomberg Global Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use. Participation in the meeting of countries involved in this Initiative is very much appreciated. Participation from the Bloomberg Foundation and partners indicates their commitment to the cause of the Initiative.

It is heartening that this Initiative has been launched to help high-burden countries in the fight against the tobacco epidemic. WHO is pleased to be a part of the Initiative. We also appreciate that of the 13 high-burden countries selected globally, four are from the South-East Asia Region.

As we are aware, nearly a quarter of the five million deaths annually from tobacco use worldwide occur in this Region. The Region bears a double burden because of the tobacco epidemic. The Region is both the largest producer; at the same time it is the largest consumer of tobacco products.

During the course of the meeting, we will be hearing about the tobacco control programmes in four countries of the South-East Asia Region. However, I should like to underline at this stage the complementary role of our Regional Tobacco Control Programme. The programme that aims to strengthen national capacity for the countries to be able to combat the tobacco epidemic effectively. Among others, this is being done through supporting Member States in the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control(FCTC).

The Bloomberg Global Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use will certainly help expand the scope of our regional work in backstopping the public sector in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Thailand. The governments of these countries will be enabled to enhance their national tobacco control plans; adopt and enforce control legislation. They will be able to implement effectively the required policies and measures against tobacco use. These include, among others, the increased tobacco taxes, and a ban on tobacco advertising, as well as a ban on smoking in public places.

Except for one, all countries in the Region are now Party to the Global Treaty on Tobacco Control.

Collaboration among all partners at all levels is the key to the success of tobacco control programmes worldwide. As a partner in the Bloomberg Global Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use, WHO in SEAR will cooperate closely with other stakeholders, nationally and internationally. We will continue our efforts in contributing to the setting of international standards on tobacco control.

Our collaboration with the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention on the Global Adult Tobacco Survey will be intensified. At the same time, we hope to work more closely with the World Lung Foundation. This is particularly in assessing the effectiveness of the implementation of tobacco control policies at the country level. Evidence from the assessment will be important for the improvement of tobacco control plans and programmes in countries.

The capacity to deal with the tobacco epidemic in most countries in the South-East Asia Region needs to be urgently strengthened. In their fight against this worldwide epidemic, the countries need support, in both expertise and funds. We, therefore, thank the Bloomberg Global Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use for coming forward generously to help the high-burden countries. I wish that similar support could also be extended to other countries that have to pursue the same fight. The Regional Office and its partners are exploring means and ways to mobilize the required resources to support these countries.

To be able to assist countries effectively in their tobacco control activities, WHO capacity in the South-East Asia Region also needs strengthening. Nonetheless, with our combined efforts, I believe, we can progress decisively in implementing the tobacco control agenda in the Region.

The Regional activities under the Bloomberg Global Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use will be reported to the forthcoming Regional Meeting of National Tobacco Control Managers to be held next month.

Sustainability of any programme is important to make a real impact. Sustainability can be ensured through strengthening of

country capacity. I am sure this Initiative can contribute significantly to strengthening country capacity in tobacco control.

As we are aware, the Initiative is initially designed for two years in South-East Asia Region. In the process of its implementation, country capacity strengthening will be particularly emphasized.

However, WHO and its partners need to think of future support to countries after two years. This is to ensure long-term sustainability of the achievements, until tobacco use is no longer a threat to public health.

At the same time, commitment and investment of concerned countries are important indeed in ensuring such a sustainability. We hope that the country participants will take back with them the conclusions and recommendations of the consultation. And we hope that they will initiate action accordingly in their respective countries without delay.

This consultation is another milestone for tobacco control in South-East Asia Region. It should provide a unique opportunity for us to learn more about the Bloomberg Global Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use. It is an opportunity for us to know its partners, and the benefits this Initiative can bring about for the national tobacco control efforts.

I am confident that this Consultation will bring us closer together in our collaboration in the fight against tobacco use. This is an excellent opportunity to share vision and ideas in order to stride forward in unison for effective tobacco control.

I believe, by the end of the day tomorrow, we will have chalked out a coordinated framework. The framework that can bring about effective implementation of planned activities within the domain of this Initiative in the South-East Asia Region.

Tobacco use has contributed to many serious health problems worldwide. We should spare no effort in fighting against it. Together, we can win this formidable health threat.

I finally wish all of you fruitful deliberations and a successful outcome. And I wish you all an enjoyable stay in Delhi.

Thank you all.