

Address by

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

At the

***Regional Meeting on Health and Development Challenges
of Noncommunicable Diseases***

***1-4 March 2011,
Jakarta, Indonesia***

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Excellency, Dr Endang Rahayu Sedyaningsih, Minister of Health, the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, distinguished participants, honorable guests and partners, ladies and gentlemen,

I warmly welcome you all to the Regional Meeting on Health and Development Challenges of Noncommunicable Diseases, and would like to thank all participants and partners for their interest and time in attending this Regional Meeting.

Ladies and gentlemen,

More attention is now being paid globally to noncommunicable diseases, or NCDs. Last year, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for a high-level meeting on prevention and control of NCDs. This UN meeting on NCDs will take place in September this year with participation of Heads of State and Governments of Member States. It will be a "UN NCD Summit".

Ladies and gentlemen,

NCDs contribute to an unacceptably high burden of avoidable morbidity and mortality in WHO's South-East Asia Region. This burden is growing unabatedly. The same trend can also be seen in low- and middle-income countries all over the world. This evolving pandemic of NCDs is largely preventable by means of effective and feasible public health interventions that tackle the major modifiable risk factors, namely tobacco use, improper diet, physical inactivity, and harmful use of alcohol.

The socioeconomic determinants of NCDs, including the vulnerability of life under constant pressure due to chronic stress and strain, need urgent attention and concerted multidisciplinary and multisectoral efforts in NCD prevention and control. Inaction in this priority public health area cannot be accepted or justified any longer. The WHO call for investment in health promotion and primary prevention of NCDs and the call for application of evidence-based approaches in NCDs management still need to be translated into practice, from words to actions, from verbal commitments to concrete allocation of human and financial resources.

The burden of NCDs in the Region is growing at an accelerated pace. There will be a 21% increase in the number of deaths caused by these conditions over the coming decade. During the same period, there will be a decrease by 16% in the number of deaths caused by infectious diseases. This phenomenon exemplifies the scale and rapidity of the prevailing epidemiological transition. The increasing burden of NCDs is the outcome of three main factors:

- ongoing demographic change;
- acquisition of unhealthy lifestyles; and
- failure of health systems to promote and protect health of the people.

Today, we understand better the processes whereby NCDs constitute a major impediment to socioeconomic development. NCDs and their risk factors are closely linked and contribute to poverty. The economic fallout of NCDs is due to escalating cost of medical care, reduction of productivity from early lives lost of labour force, the increasing loss of productivity due to disability from NCDs and the increasing social and economic dependence. The rapidly increasing disease burden and growing socioeconomic impact of NCDs in low- and middle-income countries are driven by globalization, modernization and market forces.

The contemporary development paradigm that emphasizes profit maximization at the cost of preserving and enhancing the health of people cannot be considered sustainable. The challenges in this connection are momentous, but at the same time, there are also opportunities to slow down and reverse the mounting pandemic of NCDs. The upcoming UN High-level Meeting on NCDs will focus on galvanizing multisectoral actions at global and national levels in order to address health and socioeconomic impact of NCDs in a more comprehensive manner through effective “multisectoral approaches”. This UN meeting will be another important entry-point for advocating “Healthy Public Policies” / “Health in All Policies”. It is expected that the UN High-level Meeting will also generate unwavering

global commitment and momentum for the implementation of WHO Strategy for the Prevention and Control of NCDs.

As far as WHO in this Region is concerned, our action on prevention and control of NCDs is guided by a Regional Framework, which was endorsed by WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia. The Regional Meeting being inaugurated today is a part of our preparation for participation in the UN High-level Meeting. This meeting will be the platform for information-sharing on NCD burden, as well as on policies and programmes of our Member States. We will review information on socioeconomic determinants and on development implications of NCDs, and we will also identify regional issues and challenges for our collaborative efforts in this important area in the years to come.

We expect to come out of the meeting with key recommendations on strengthening NCD surveillance, prevention and control through the PHC approach and by building strong multisectoral and multi-level partnerships.

Distinguished participants,

The growing commitment and capacity of Member States in the Region to scale up the integrated prevention and control of NCDs is well documented by the results of a series of national NCD surveys conducted in 2001, 2006 and 2010.

As indicated by the surveys' results, Indonesia, the host of this meeting, is among the leaders in high-level commitment to NCD prevention and control. The first NCD Policy and Strategy was developed for the country in 2003. The National Plan

for Prevention and Management of NCDs, 2010-2014, is being implemented. There is a directorate with strong cadre of capable staff members in the Ministry of Health to lead and coordinate NCD actions in the country.

Considerable efforts have been made, and some progress have been noted in the Region with regard to strengthening partnerships among the stakeholders in NCD prevention and control; both within and outside the health sector. Among others, NCD networks have been formed at national and regional levels. The functioning of these networks has been fully funded and technically supported by WHO. The regional network (SEANET-NCD) has been formed and it meets biennially; the meeting of SEANET-NCD greatly facilitates WHO advocacy for multisectoral and multilateral approaches in integrated NCD prevention and control.

I trust that, with your experiences and your combined wisdom, the recommendations emanating from this meeting will further strengthen our determination and commitment to the effective implementation of Regional Framework and Global Strategy on NCD prevention and control.

I am certain that this meeting will effectively contribute to the preparation for our effective participation in the UN High-level Meeting on NCD, to take place in the coming September.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I gratefully thank the Honorable Health Minister of the Republic of Indonesia for her gracious presence to inaugurate this meeting.

Finally, I wish you all success in your deliberations and hope you have a pleasant stay in Jakarta.

Thank you.