

Opening Remarks

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

At

The 15th Meeting of Roll Back Malaria Partnership Board

WHO/SEARO
11-12 November 2008

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REGIONAL DIRECTOR, WHO SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

Honourable health ministers, distinguished members of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership Board, Prof. Awa Marie Coll-Seck, Executive Director, Roll Back Malaria Partnership, honourable guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed my pleasure to welcome you all to the WHO Regional Office for South- East Asia. I am pleased to learn that this is the first meeting of the RBM Partnership Board in the South-East Asia Region, and it is being held at this Regional Office. We are really privileged to have the opportunity to help facilitate the conduct of the meeting, and we will do our best to ensure the required logistics and convenience.

We all agree that considerable progress in malaria control has been achieved by the RBM Partnership Initiative since its inception in 1998. This is especially true in building partnerships, and in resource mobilization, with the aim to reduce the burden of malaria by half by the end of the decade. As far as the South-East Asia Region is concerned, malaria still remains one of the major public health problems. The burden of malaria in this part of the world is second only to that in Africa. With a large population at risk of malaria, and the presence of several contributing factors, countries of South-East Asia find it difficult to control malaria effectively without outside support.

Over the past decade, several countries in this Region had reported a perceptible decline in malaria morbidity and mortality. However, the situation remains highly dynamic and diverse. While many countries in South-East Asia still suffer from a high malaria burden and endure frequent outbreaks of the disease, a few are aiming a final thrust towards malaria elimination.

Needless to say, the South-East Asia Region is well known as the epicentre of drug-resistant malaria. There is the potential of this drug-resistant strain of malaria spreading to other parts of the world. A major effort is being made by the countries affected in tackling this global health threat. This effort of the Member States is being backed by several partners including the two WHO Regions of South-East Asia and the Western Pacific. Member States in the South-East Asia Region are palpably concerned about the persistence of the malaria problem; which contributes significantly to the health, social and economic burden in the Region. At last year's session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia in Thimpu, Bhutan, Member States committed themselves to working coordinatedly in their fight against the disease. The Member States also joined in the global observance of the first "World Malaria Day" this year.

I am pleased that the RBM Partnership has chosen New Delhi as the venue for the 15th meeting of its Board, and that India, which is one of the countries affected by the disease, represents the WHO South-East Asia Region as a member of the board. During the past few months, we had witnessed a number of important developments in connection with malaria control. There include:

- the launch of the World Malaria Report 2008,
- the start of the Global Malaria Action Plan, and very importantly,
- the pledge by donors of around US\$ 3 billion to fight this pernicious scourge.

This is indeed good news; the good news towards a bold step forward in the global endeavour to combat malaria. This meeting of the Board of RBM Partnership is another milestone of the global efforts in malaria control and elimination. With these few words, I wish the 15th meeting of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership Board all success.

Thank you.