

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

At

***The Thirty-first Session of
WHO South-East Asia Advisory Committee
on Health Research***

***21-23 July 2009
Kathmandu, Nepal***

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Excellency, Umakant Choudhary, Minister of Health and Population, the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, Dr Dirga Singh Bam, Honourable Health Secretary, Nepal, Ministry of Health and Population, Dr Mahesh Kumar Maskey, Executive Chairman, Nepal Health Research Council, distinguished members of the Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR), distinguished special invitees, honourable guests, ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of WHO, I am pleased to welcome you all to the Thirty-first session of the WHO South-East Asia (SEA) Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR). I must thank all ACHR members and special invitees and others for sparing their valuable time to attend this session of our ACHR. I gratefully thank the Ministry of Health and Population, the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal for agreeing to co-host this meeting. My special thanks go to the Nepal National Health Research Council for taking the initiative for this agreement from the government. I gratefully thank H.E. Umakant Choudhary, Minister of Health and Population, the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, for gracing the inaugural session.

Excellency, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

In 1959, the World Health Assembly established the WHO Global Advisory Committee on Medical Research (ACMR). This Committee was mandated to review the WHO research programme; and advise the Director-General on WHO research policies and priorities. The WHO Global ACMR was then renamed in 1986 as the WHO Global ACHR.

As far as this Region is concerned, the WHO SEA/ACMR was established in 1976, and renamed as ACHR in 1987. The SEA/ACHR advises the Regional Director on regional research policies and strategies, as well as on the criteria for determining research priorities for the Region. Also, it promotes inter-institutional and intercountry collaboration in health research. This is in addition to advising on the identification of research activities that are socially relevant and goal-oriented for the SEA Region.

During the past 33 years, the work of SEA/ACHR has contributed significantly to the development and management of WHO collaborative programmes in areas falling under both infectious and non-infectious diseases, as well as in health services and health systems development.

The following are some of the important contributions made by the SEA/ACHR in the early stages of its work:

- research in chronic liver diseases;
- studies on the treatment of snakebite;
- studies on chronic respiratory diseases; and

- research on and development of dengue vaccine.

These were the significant activities initiated at the beginning of ACHR's work in the SEA Region, which was the first to pursue dengue vaccine development up to the third phase of field trial; this development was totally backed up by WHO support. Moreover, this development took place under close advice and guidance of the Regional ACHR. The SEA/ACHR works coordinatedly with, and in the process, contributes to the work of the Global ACHR.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are here at the Thirty-first session of the SEA/ACHR in Kathmandu. This country has a long history of systematic development of health research. The country has successfully established the Nepal Health Research Council as the apex body of health research. It has contributed significantly to WHO's research work in many specific areas, at regional and global levels. Several experts from Nepal have been associated with the work of SEA/ACHR as its members.

I hope that the contribution from this country to the work of SEA/ACHR would be maintained in future.

Distinguished participants,

This session of the SEA/ACHR is being convened at a time when we face several important public health challenges such as:

- climate change;
- influenza pandemic H1N1 2009;
- persistent endemicity of AI (H5N1) in the Region; and
- uncontrolled outbreaks of dengue and Chickungunya.

These challenges are in addition to several persisting scourges, such as of TB and HIV/AIDS, which are intractable to available interventions. I am sure, as usual, we will receive useful advice and guidance from the SEA/ACHR on the relevant research agenda and direction in moving forward to tackle these public health challenges.

I, once again, thank all participants for their interest and time in attending this meeting. I wish the Thirty-first session of the SEA/ACHR all the best. I also wish all participants the most productive deliberations; and a fruitful outcome from the meeting. And, I wish them all an enjoyable stay in the city of Kathmandu.

Thank you.