

Inaugural Address

by

***Dr Samlee Plianbangchang
Regional Director, WHO/SEARO***

at

***The Third Regional Consultation on the Proposed
Revision of International Health Regulations***

***WHO/SEARO, New Delhi, India
27-29 January 2005***

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Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia**

Distinguished participants,

Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

- With great pleasure, I welcome you all to the Third Regional Consultation on the Proposed Revision of the International Health Regulations (IHR).
- This consultation is taking place at a critical time in the process of the IHR revision.
- It follows the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) held between 1 and 12 November 2004; and it precedes the second Meeting of this Working Group which is to be held next month.
- As you are aware, the Regional Office had already organized two regional consultations on this subject last year, in April, and then in June/July.
- National workshops were also held in most of the Member States to review the draft IHR revision document from the perspective of many stakeholders representing various sectors; thereby bringing their much-needed inputs to the revision process.

- A number of issues were raised and several clarifications sought on the document; these related to:
 - core capacity,
 - resource constraints,
 - specific regional and local health threats, and
 - measures to override trade and economic interests, etc.
- At the two previous consultations, a number of valuable suggestions and recommendations were made in relation to:
 - the need for reporting of animal diseases of significant threat to human health,
 - clear definition of the role and functions of national IHR focal points,
 - greater clarity with regard to deployment of WHO investigation teams, and
 - the need for a more participatory role for affected countries in the process of settlement of disputes.

Distinguished participants,

- The first session of the Intergovernmental Working Group was attended by over 500 delegates representing more than 150 Member States.
- In addition, representatives from the United Nations and related organizations, specialized agencies, inter-governmental organizations and nongovernmental organizations in official relations with WHO, were present.

- The IGWG extensively debated all the 67 articles and 9 annexures of the draft revision document.
- However, due to lack of consensus among participants from Member States, it was not possible to reach a unanimous decision on any of the articles or annexures.
- Delegates, nonetheless, expressed their support to the guiding principles underlying the revision proposals, and supported the process adopted to finalize the revision.
- Some WHO Regions, including ours, decided to hold another consultation, with the view to arriving at a regional consensus, in order to help further facilitate the revision process at the second IGWG meeting.

Distinguished participants,

- Having gone through the whole process at both regional and country levels, we, in the South-East Asia Region, were able to agree among ourselves on most of the articles and related issues in the draft revision document.
- Some important issues were particularly underlined by our Member States at the First IGWG meeting.
- We felt that there was a need for meaningful participation of affected countries in the determination of what constitutes Public Health Emergencies of International Concern.
- This participation by affected countries was important, since it would safeguard the interests of those countries from the negative consequences of temporary or time-bound recommendations.

- We, from South-East Asia Region, recommended that at least one member of the Emergency Committee should be an expert nominated by the affected country.
- The role of the Emergency Committee is to advise the Director-General of WHO in determining whether a given event constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Concern; and to advise the DG in issuing recommendations regarding the emergency.
- This proposal from our Region was supported by many Member States from other WHO regions as well.
- In addition, we made many valuable suggestions with regard to the temporary or time-bound, as well as the standing recommendations, particularly those pertaining to the procedures for initiation and termination, as appropriate, of the temporary or time-bound recommendations.
- The strengthening of core capacity to effectively implement various public health measures at the points of entry are important issues for us.
- Lack of adequate resources, both human and financial, is an issue of overriding concern for us.
- We feel that we will need appropriate means and ways to address these issues and concerns, and these ways and means should be incorporated into the revised IHR.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- This consultation provides an opportunity for us to review, once again, the contents of the improved text of IGWG Chairperson, which contains all the important issues raised by Member States at the first meeting of IGWG.

- The distinguished participants may wish to take a fresh look at these issues from the regional and country perspectives, and come up with a common position for the forthcoming IGWG meeting.
- Finally, I wish you every success in your deliberations, and look forward to your valuable contribution to the finalization of the IHR revision.

Thank you.