

Introductory Remarks

by

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

at

***The Informal Consultation on Development
Of Vision Paper on Emerging Diseases***

***New Delhi, India
29 April 2004***

**Introductory Remarks by RD at the Informal Consultation on Development of
Vision Paper on Emerging Diseases, New Delhi, 29 April 2004.**

First of all, I would like to warmly welcome you to this informal brainstorming session on a topic which is of critical and topical importance to our region, and indeed the world over.

I believe that the issue of emerging diseases deserves now our full attention.

The reasons are clear. In the recent past, we have witnessed three emerging situations which not only grabbed international headlines but also took a heavy toll of life, and contributed to economic loss of billions of dollars i.e.

- ? Plague in India in 1996
- ? SARS and Avian Influenza pandemic over the past two years

These and many other emerging situations have brought home the stark reality and the message is loud and clear.

- that no country is safe as long as an emerging disease is spreading in another country (example: SARS from Vietnam and Hong Kong to Canada)
- that microbes require neither the passport nor visa to cross borders
- that such epidemics will continue to occur in the future, perhaps at increasing frequency and continue to challenge public health (between 1973 and 1995, 28 new pathogens were discovered including HIV, Hepatitis C & E, Hantaan and Ebola to name a few)

- that increasing international travel, population movement across borders, industrialization and other social and economic factors contribute to emerging diseases spreading as a negative consequence of globalization.

Clearly, in order to defeat microbes and to minimize their impact, we need to sharpen:

- our ability to anticipate the emerging situations;
- strengthen our surveillance and epidemic alert system;
- enhance our preparedness to detect the uncommon occurrence early and to respond effectively and efficiently.

The emerging diseases also highlight the countries' inherent vulnerability and inter-dependence in combating the new threats. Therefore, there is a growing need for cross-border collaboration and for enhanced cooperation among countries and regions – to share among each other information, expertise, experiences, and tools and intervention strategies.

Against this background, our meeting today provides a platform for us to have preliminary discussions on this issue and agree on the basic outline of the vision paper – which will form the basic framework or future strategy on emerging diseases in our region.

Thank you.