

***Address by***

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

***At***

***Joint Inauguration of  
The 27th Meeting of Ministers of Health of  
Member States of the WHO South-East Asia  
Region***

***and***

***The Sixty-second Session of the WHO Regional  
Committee for South-East Asia***

***7 September 2009  
Kathmandu, Nepal***

**Joint Inauguration of  
The 27th Meeting of Ministers of Health of Member States of the  
WHO South-East Asia Region**

**and**

**The Sixty-second Session of the WHO Regional Committee for  
South-East Asia**

**7 September 2009  
Kathmandu, Nepal**

***Address by:***

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

-----

His Excellency Mr Madhav Kumar Nepal, the Honourable Prime Minister, Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, Honourable Ministers of Health of Countries of the WHO South-East Asia Region, Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General, World Health Organization, distinguished country representatives, honourable guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I warmly welcome you all to the joint inauguration of:

- The 27th Meeting of Ministers of Health of the Countries of the South-East Asia Region, and
- The Sixty-second Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia.

I gratefully thank the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal for hosting these two important meetings. I thank His Excellency Mr Madhav Kumar Nepal, the Honourable Prime Minister, Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, for agreeing to inaugurate this joint inauguration session. I thank the honourable Health Ministers and distinguished Country Representatives for sparing their valuable time to attend the meetings. I thank the WHO Director-General for her gracious presence to address the joint inauguration, and to participate in the deliberations during the two meetings.

Excellencies,

The South-East Asia Region is home to 28% of the world's population, or about 1.7 billion people. It has distinct geographical and demographic features. The social, cultural and economic dimensions are diverse among Member countries. The Region accounts for 25% of the world's mortality and 28% of the global disease burden. However, the regional average of the Human Development Index (HDI) is well above 0.5.

In 2007, the regional average life expectancy at birth was over 64 years. The population growth rate has come down to well below 2.4%. Nevertheless, formidable challenges remain in the Region in areas of:

- maternal, infant and child mortality;
- double burden of communicable and noncommunicable diseases; and
- the generally weak health systems infrastructure.

As far as our host country is concerned, Nepal has made considerable progress towards its national health goals. The country's immunization coverage increased from 75% in 2005 to 84% in 2008. Over the last five years, the per capita calorie consumption per day in the country has increased by 300 units, surpassing the regional average of 2,430 calories per capita per day.

Nepal is the first Asian country to sign a "National Compact" with International Health Partnerships, the partnerships that emphasize aid effectiveness as well as national ownership and leadership in health. The Government of Nepal deserves commendation for these and other achievements in their health development efforts.

Excellencies, distinguished representatives,

This meeting of health ministers and this session of the WHO Regional Committee is another step forward in the quest for health development in the SEA Region.

Honourable ministers will deliberate upon two key subjects:

- the impact of global economic downturn on health, and
- protecting health facilities in emergencies.

The Ministers will also review progress in the implementation of the New Delhi Declaration on Protecting Human Health from Climate Change.

For the Regional Committee, in addition to the matters relating to WHO programme development and management, a number of important areas will be reviewed and discussed, such as:

- Measles;
- The code of practice for international recruitment of health personnel; and
- Strengthening the health workforce in the SEA Region.

Excellencies,

The two meetings are being held at a time of the influenza A(H1N1) pandemic across the world. On this occasion, we will have the opportunity to update ourselves about the latest situation and on how to move forward. We are also meeting at a time when we face the repercussion of the global economic uncertainty.

Strategic planning for more efficient use of available health resources will have to be our key focus during these meetings. The combined wisdom and regional solidarity will take us a long way forward in facing these formidable challenges.

I gratefully thank the honourable ministers and distinguished representatives for their concern over the issues being tabled for their consideration. I would also like to take this opportunity of expressing my thanks to the local organizing committee, and to other national staff members for the excellent arrangements made for the two events.

I wish the honourable ministers and distinguished representatives productive deliberations during the course of their meetings. I wish the two meetings a successful conclusion and outcomes. And I wish all of us an enjoyable stay in the city of Kathmandu.

Thank you.