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Statement by

**Dr Samlee Plianbangchang
Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia
(An intervention on Tsunami)**

Chairman,

Distinguished Members of the Board, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- The 26th December 2004 will forever be a date that haunts our memory, because of the terrible earthquake that occurred in the Indian Ocean.
- The destructive waves of Tsunami battered the shores of many countries and the WHO South-East Asia Region bore the brunt of it.
- Among our Member States, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India and Maldives were affected the most.
- Myanmar and Bangladesh were the least among the affected.
- In response to this disaster, I immediately established a Tsunami Task Force, and activated our Operations Room to function round the clock.
- The Task Force is operating in close coordination and consultation with the Headquarters Health Action in Crisis team.
- The work of this task force is to

- Coordinate information from affected countries, and to ensure public health monitoring;
 - mobilize and deploy human resources;
 - manage finance and supplies;
 - Coordinate and facilitate logistics; and
 - handle media and public communications.
- A SEARO website on the Tsunami disaster was developed from the second day itself.
 - It features a daily situation report and provides access to a range of key technical guidelines and manuals for the management of emergency situations.
 - Daily teleconferences are held between affected countries, Headquarters and the Regional Office to ensure consistent communication, joint decisions and coordinated efforts.
 - Satellite communication has also been established with Sri Lanka, Maldives and Aceh in Indonesia.
 - In all affected countries in the Region, we have functioning Operations Rooms in WHO Country Offices.
 - WHO operational units are being established at the field level outside the capital cities, in both Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

- During the early phase of crisis, our priority attention was paid to the provision of technical advice.
- Technical guidelines and manuals were compiled and disseminated widely for use by emergency teams in the fields.
- WHO emergency staff, as well as field staff in other programmes, were immediately deployed to the most affected areas.
- Necessary medical supplies, such as lifesaving drugs, antibiotics, water purification tablets and vaccines were provided.
- As mentioned by the Director-General, considerable concern has been expressed in the area of mental health, due to psychosocial trauma.
- WHO quickly responds to the request for technical advice and guidance in overcoming this important aspect of health problem.
- Distinguished board members,
- The main focus of WHO's work now is to coordinate with other international agencies in assessing the damage to health infrastructure; support the restoration of basic health services; and provide technical advice in the formulation of plans for rehabilitation and rebuilding.
- A Tsunami Health Bulletin will be regularly issued to report on the health situation in the affected areas.

- A strategy for health action in emergencies during the first 100 days is in place.
- This strategy focuses on the five key priority needs:
 1. disease surveillance and response, including early warning systems;
 2. coordination of the activities of health aspects of the relief operations;
 3. ensuring access to essential healthcare;
 4. provision of technical guidance on critical public health issues, and on the strengthening of routine health services; and
 5. coordinating the restoration of medical supply chain.
- To respond to the immediate needs of the affected countries, we have mobilized from all WHO Regional offices and HQ more than 60 professionals to help in Indonesia, 50 in Sri Lanka, 27 in Thailand, and 20 in Maldives.
- To ensure the efficiency of our inputs to the whole operation,
- Additional experts are still being mobilized and standing by to move in quickly as and when required.
- Through the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, more than 120 epidemiologists are on stand-by for immediate deployment.

- Through the generous support of many countries, WHO has mobilized additional supplies and equipment, such as a mobile laboratory in Aceh.
- To ensure the efficiency of our inputs to the whole operation, we are forming teams of senior staff to be sent out to the affected countries and areas to carry out quick assessment of WHO performance on the ground, especially the coordination among WHO staff members themselves and coordination with other agencies.
- Equally important, we are monitoring very closely the utilization of financial resource to ensure transparency and accountability.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- We now have a strategic plan for rehabilitation. As we enter the second phase, WHO will further refine this plan in close consultation with the World Bank and other key partners.
- However impressive the efforts of WHO may be, it is only a modest contribution to the relief operations, compared to the generous response of many friendly countries.
- We must appreciate the valuable contributions of all players in the field who come to help the affected population.

- Given the sheer magnitude and scope of this catastrophe, no one organization can carry this mission alone.
- WHO is supporting national health authorities of affected countries in close coordination and cooperation with other agencies.
- Never before, have the organizations of the UN system demonstrated such an ability to respond to the immediate needs during crisis with unity, professionalism and speed.
- We have mounted an unprecedented response to this disaster. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Director General and all the Regional Directors of WHO for their sympathy, concern and solidarity. Their support to the South-East Asia Region in this difficult time is very much appreciated.
- We must thank the donors who have provided necessary funds to make WHO mission during this crisis possible.
- In conclusion, I may say that every disaster presents opportunities to further improve health services for the people.
- We must move more efficiently to respond to the urgent need for enhancing the capacity of the health sector of Member States in the area of emergency preparedness and response.
- Now, we must seize the opportunity to help countries to rebuild and strengthen local health infrastructure that existed prior to this calamity.

- We are facing a huge challenge but I am convinced that we will succeed through our united efforts for the long-lasting benefits to those unfortunate peoples.

Thank You.