The Regional Committee,

Recalling that, approximately 1.4 million deaths are caused by hepatitis viruses every year globally, with an estimated 800,000 due to hepatitis B and 500,000 as a result of hepatitis C infection, and that around 500,000 of these estimated deaths occur in the WHO South-East Asia Region alone, with deaths associated with viral hepatitis exceeding the mortality estimates for malaria, dengue and HIV/AIDS combined,

Mindful of the fact that an estimated 100 million people infected with hepatitis B virus and 30 million infected with hepatitis C reside in the South-East Asia Region, and that the prevalence of hepatitis B and hepatitis C co-infection is up to 60% among persons living with HIV infection,

Concerned about the limited and fragmentary nature of the available data from the Region on the rates of infection with hepatitis viruses, clinical disease caused by these viruses, and the associated morbidity and mortality, and further, that no data are available on the societal and economic impact (in terms of years of life lost, disability, loss of productivity, expenditure on medical care, etc.) of these infections in the Region,

Taking note that in 2010, the Sixty-third World Health Assembly adopted its first resolution on viral hepatitis and called for a comprehensive approach to its prevention and control, and that in June 2013, WHO launched the Global Hepatitis Network, one of its aims being to support Member States with planning and implementation of viral hepatitis plans and programmes,
Further recalling World Health Assembly resolution WHA67.6 that called upon all Member States to launch nationally coordinated programmes to combat viral hepatitis,

Noting that WHO launched the guidance for the screening, care and treatment of persons with hepatitis C infection in April 2014, updated its prequalified list of hepatitis B and C serological tests and prepared treatment guidelines for hepatitis B and C that will be issued later in 2014,

Affirming that the WHO Regional strategy on prevention and control of viral hepatitis (SEA-CD-282) is aligned with the WHO Global action plan, and that the Strategy defines actions that need to be undertaken by Member States with support from WHO,

Realizing the inadequate awareness among health administrators and policy-makers, medical professionals and the general population about hepatitis viruses, including their routes of transmission, risk factors and impact on human health,

Recognizing that various health systems challenges need to be addressed to prevent and control viral hepatitis, in particular, inadequate disease surveillance systems; low rates of infant hepatitis B vaccine coverage, especially for the dose at birth; lack of access to clean water and sanitation; limited knowledge, availability of, access to and use of preventive services for viral hepatitis, including screening of transfused blood and blood products; and inadequate allocation of financial and manpower resources,

Concerned about the high cost of and inadequate and inequitable access to affordable treatment for viral hepatitis, and its long-term complications (cirrhosis and liver cancer), and cost of liver transplantation in patients with end-stage disease, and

Keenly aware of the importance and need for timely prevention and control of viral hepatitis,

1. **URGES** Member States:

   (a) to designate a focal point and/or establish a unit/programme, as appropriate, responsible for the prevention and control of viral hepatitis;

   (b) to establish/strengthen national viral hepatitis surveillance systems;

   (c) to develop/update and implement national plan(s) for the prevention and control of viral hepatitis including management of individuals living with hepatitis;

   (d) to promote rational use of medicines for the management of viral hepatitis;
(e) to advocate for political commitment and mobilize adequate resources for the prevention and control of viral hepatitis; and

(f) to promote research in order to strengthen prevention and control of viral hepatitis, including research and development of medical products.

2. REQUESTS the Regional Director to accord priority and organizational capacity in order to provide technical support to Member States in implementation of national viral hepatitis prevention and control efforts based on the WHO Regional strategy on prevention and control of viral hepatitis.

Sixth session, 12 September 2014