Presentation of credentials to HE State Counsellor
Daw Aung San Suu Kyi by Dr Stephan Paul Jost

New WHO Representative to Myanmar Dr S P Jost presented his credentials to HE State Counsellor and Union Minister of Foreign Affairs Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Naypyidaw on 8 February 2017.

At the meeting, they discussed matters for future cooperation between the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the World Health Organization (WHO). The importance of public health was highlighted. Ways to improve quality health services, especially basic services, and access to affordable essential medicines, good nutrition and healthy food discussed. Overall national health development in cooperation with different sectors and partners was considered vital to achieve tangible health benefits for all.

World Health Day 2017 focussing on mental health

World Health Day, celebrated on 7 April every year to mark the anniversary of the founding of WHO in 1948, provides a unique opportunity to mobilize action around a specific health topic of concern to people all over the world.

The theme of 2017 World Health Day campaign this year focusses on mental health -- depression in particular.

Depression affects people of all ages, from all walks of life, in all countries. It causes mental anguish and impacts people’s ability to carry out even the simplest daily tasks. Sometimes devastating consequences result for relationships with family, friends or the ability to earn a living. At worst, depression can lead to suicide, now a second leading cause of death among 15-29-year olds.

Yet, depression can be prevented and treated. A better understanding of what depression is, and how it can be prevented and treated, will help reduce stigma associated with the condition, and lead to more people seeking help.
**Call for action** to ‘bend the curve to end TB’ in South East Asia - at recent Regional Ministerial Meeting

WHO SEARO organized a key meeting, at ministerial level, to accelerate action towards ending TB as a public health problem by 2030.

The meeting of Hon Health Ministers of South East Asia Region (SEAR) Member States was held 15-16 March 2017 in New Delhi, India. Many important technical and financial partners participated. Discussions highlighted that in 2015 in SEAR an estimated 4.74 million people developed TB and over 710,000 died from the disease. Despite considerable efforts by state and non state actors, the annual decline of TB incidence remains 1.5% to 2% - which is considered too slow to achieve WHO’s End TB targets and sustainable development goals by 2030. Attaining Universal Health Coverage will be a crucial pre-requisite - as mentioned in the Call for Action issued by the Ministers of Health. TB is a priority. Commitments include increased investment towards ending TB in the Region by 2030, universal access to high quality TB care in all sectors, resolve to tackle multi drug resistant TB and patient-centered support.

WHO Regional Director, Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, declared to make TB the 8th Regional Flagship to support implementation of these efforts. SEAR is establishing a “bending the TB curve initiative” to facilitate this movement. Myanmar’s delegation, led by HE Union Minister of Health and Sports, Dr Myint Htwe, played a very active role in the discussions and in the Call for Action. In fact, Myanmar has been adapting and implementing new strategies to improve TB prevention and care -- including data and information derived from surveillance and surveys. Further, community involvement and active case detection will be important strategies ‘to bend the curve’.

**Regional Artemisinin Initiative -- high level inter-country meeting held in Myanmar**

The 2nd high level Regional Artemisinin Initiative (RAI) meeting was held in Naypyidaw on 2 March 2017. Senior delegates from the countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam) met to agree priorities for sustainable financing and strategies malaria elimination -- including shared priorities for regional financing. Many international and national partners participated, discussing ways forward for implementation 2018-2020 and beyond.

The meeting was opened by HE Dr Myint Htwe, Union Minister for Health and Sports, Myanmar, highlighting the importance of working together to achieve malaria elimination in the Greater Mekong countries. The Executive Director, Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, and senior staff attended; as did the Ambassador of Japan; WHO Representative to Myanmar and Director, Global Malaria Programme, WHO HQ; UNOPS Regional Director and senior staff; Chair of RAI Regional Steering Committee; Special Envoy, Asia Pacific Leaders Malaria Alliance; Director Generals and staff from the Ministries of Health of the Greater Mekong countries agreed to coordinate and collaborate to achieve the common goal. Civil society and ethnic health organizations participated actively. WHO’s technical support towards malaria elimination was presented and will focus to strengthen support for hard to reach areas, further improving surveillance, prevention, case detection and treatment: it is vital to continue the progress made without delay, not only in its own right but also to prevent the emergence of drug resistance.
Stakeholders meeting on Joint External Evaluation of International Health Regulations

National and international stakeholders on Joint External Evaluation met at Naypyidaw on 6 Feb 2017. The Joint External Evaluation is a voluntary, collaborative process to assess a country’s capacity under the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR) to prevent, detect, and rapidly respond to public health threats. These may occur naturally or due to deliberate or accidental events, allowing countries to identify urgent needs for the national health security system. Myanmar’s Ministry of Health and Sports, other concerned ministries, WHO, FAO and other UN and international organizations attended this meeting.

HE Union Minister of Health and Sports, Dr Myint Htwe, gave the opening addresses in the meeting—highlighting the benefits of this evaluation—helping to ascertain improvements the country’s capacity to deal with potential or actual public health threats. These can quickly lead to increased burden of disease as well as economic loss. Intersectoral participation is crucial for success. Next, Dr Stephan Paul Jost, gave the opening remarks on his very first day as the new WHO Representative to Myanmar. Emphasizing the fact that WHO at every level—global, regional and country—is active to support this process, he commended the national authorities for the leadership in taking this initiative forward. It is an important contribution to national, regional and global health security.

Joint symposium on Maternal Death Surveillance and Response – collaborative efforts to ending preventable maternal mortality

Maternal deaths are still an important public health problem in Myanmar. Maternal death surveillance and response (MDSR) serves as a continuous cycle of routine identification, notification, quantification and determination of causes and avoidability of maternal deaths. Importantly, the use of this information serves to respond with actions that will prevent future deaths. Ministry of Health and Sports, Myanmar, is putting great efforts to end preventable maternal mortality, to attain the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. With combined support from World Health Organization, United Nations Population Fund and other partners, the Ministry has launched the MDSR system in September 2016—which is being rolled out to 17 States and Regions during 2017.

Being a key component of this process, on 24 February 2017, a joint symposium on MDSR was organized by the Obstetrical and Gynecological Society of Myanmar Medical Association at their 12th Annual Conference. Obstetricians from both public and private sectors partook. As did leaders of Departments of Public Health and Medical Services from different States and Regions, with their unique roles in Myanmar’s MDSR system, who came together at the symposium. It was an opportune moment of articulating challenges and sharing good practices operating in their own areas. The MDSR team from Sri Lanka’s Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine also participated and shared best peer experiences from the operationalization of MDSR in Sri Lanka.

The symposium helped improve implementation of the MDSR system in Myanmar. This in turn will contribute to ending, ultimately, preventable maternal mortality by 2030.
Launching UN joint programme on Cervical Cancer prevention and control in Myanmar

The UN Global Joint Programme on Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control for Myanmar was launched with a visit of inception mission to Naypyidaw 6-9 March 2017.

Mission team members included WHO (headquarters, regional and country offices), IAEA and IARC, with UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and UNAIDS also participating in this initiative. The launching ceremony was inaugurated, on behalf of Ministry of Health and Sports, by Permanent Secretary Prof Thet Khaing Win. On behalf of UN country team and participating seven UN agencies, WHO Representative Dr Stephan P Jost described the significance of the UN joint programme in the context of high-level global commitments to achieve the sustainable development goals and targets related to noncommunicable diseases. This programme has three pillars - prevention, screening and treatment - which it was important to balance well.

Preventing cervical cancer through universal access for adolescent girls and women to sexual and reproductive health services is feasible and cost-effective. Cervical cancer prevention contributes to a number of targets under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in for example 3.4, by 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from NCDs and target 7, universal access to sexual and reproductive health. The UN Global Joint Programme on Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control was developed to support countries in their efforts to build a functioning and sustainable, comprehensive cervical cancer prevention and control programme of high quality.

World TB Day 2017 commemoration ceremony

World TB Day 2017 was commemorated at Naypyidaw on 24th March. The theme this year *unite to end TB, leave no one behind*. Prof Thet Khaing Win, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health & Sports, opened the commemorative event: “Of Myanmar’s 51.4 million people, about 200,000 were estimated to be infected with TB annually. Around 150,000 patients were diagnosed and treated during 2016. So we should accelerate our efforts to find the remaining patients,” the Permanent Secretary said.

Dr Stephan Jost, WHO Representative to Myanmar, conveyed the WHO South East Asia Regional Director’s message on World TB Day 2017: *to bend the TB curve we need to do more and we need to do it fast.* Myanmar is one 30 high burden TB countries in the world. Significant improvements have taken place in case detection, in treatment success and in reaching people previously unreached. At the same time, continuing progress is necessary to bend the TB curve, to tackle TB-HIV and to face the challenge of multi drug resistant TB.

Many partners, national and international, contributed to the exhibition held on the occasion of World TB Day, highlighting our common efforts.

**important dates**

24-30 April: World Immunization Week  
25 April: World Malaria Day  
22-31 May: 70th World Health Assembly  
31 May: World No Tobacco Day  
1-2 June: 141st WHO Executive Board