Message for Souvenir on the occasion of
Joint Annual Conference of “The Indian Society for Malaria and Other Communicable Diseases” and “Indian Association of Epidemiologists”
India Habitat Centre, Delhi 2-4 November 2012

In view of the high disease burden brought about by malaria and other communicable diseases in the WHO South-East Asia Region, I am happy to note that this important joint conference is being convened.

The theme chosen of “Healthy Public Policy” is indeed very appropriate, considering the important role of other sectors beyond health in influencing the disease burden of malaria and other communicable diseases.

Healthy Public Policy is similar to Health in All policies. It deals with policies of other sectors beyond health that have a bearing on health.

It has been high on the health and development agenda at the national, regional and global levels for a long time. It gained greater momentum after the Commission on Social Determinants of Health, which was established by WHO, presented its report in 2007.

Health is influenced strongly by a multitude of factors outside the domain of the health sector. These socioeconomic, political and physical factors are determinants of health.

Intensive intersectoral coordination and collaboration is indispensible to produce and implement good Healthy Public Policy. Most importantly, it requires political commitments from the highest level of government.

Healthy Public Policy is also important in our strides towards achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) that ultimately leads to Health for All. Many perceive UHC solely as an effort to provide medical insurance coverage to prevent catastrophic health expenditure that may impoverish the spender. As a result of this, public
health interventions that are more cost-effective in reducing disease burden and improving the quality of life suffer from a perennial shortage of resources.

Epidemiology has been practised in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating public health interventions and medical care. Epidemiology has also been applied in other sectors and disciplines beyond health. I am sure that the Indian Association of Epidemiologists has realized this and continually advocates it to its members and other relevant stakeholders and collaborating organizations.

Currently, death due to noncommunicable diseases has surpassed the death toll of communicable diseases. However, this does not mean that we should relax our vigilance towards communicable diseases. Continual vigilance towards communicable diseases is crucial due to the emerging problem of increasing antimicrobial resistance.

The problem is exacerbated by the emergence and re-emergence of infectious diseases; the majority of which are zoonotic diseases. Even developed countries are not spared.

Emerging infectious diseases can lead to a public health emergency of international concern with spread of diseases across international borders. Under the International Health Regulations (2005), it is the legal requirement of all countries to prevent such spread.

I am confident that this joint conference will come up with important recommendations related to the control of communicable diseases in general and malaria in particular, using an epidemiological approach.

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