

Message from the Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region, on World TB Day 2016

“Unite to END TB”



The theme of this year’s World TB Day is ‘Unite to end TB’. Ending the tuberculosis epidemic, which has long been epidemiologically and scientifically feasible, would be a historic achievement. Now, more than ever, we need to make this happen.

The WHO South-East Asia Region is home to 26% of the world’s population, but accounts for 41% of the global burden of TB incidence. In the Region in 2014, TB prevalence was estimated at 5.4 million cases while TB incidence was around 4 million. About 460 000 people died of tuberculosis. Eliminating the disease in the Region is critical to ending the global TB epidemic.

Poverty is a powerful determinant of TB. Overcrowding and poorly ventilated living and working environments constitute direct risk factors for TB transmission. With most countries in the Region enjoying GDP growth rates of more than 5%, it is unacceptable to still have high TB burdens. This has been duly recognized by all stakeholders. The Global political and economic commitments by heads of states, donors and partners are reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where TB gains prominence under Goal 3, target 3.3. This calls for ending the epidemics of AIDS, **tuberculosis**, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combating hepatitis, waterborne diseases and other communicable diseases by 2030. With the SEA Region’s experience in eradicating smallpox and achieving polio-free status, it is well placed to end the TB epidemic. The SEA Region was among those that met all three 2015 MDG targets for TB, including “halting and reversing the incidence of TB” and achieving a “50% reduction in mortality and prevalence”. Access to TB care has similarly expanded substantially since the year 2000, with a treatment success rate of 88%. Almost 22 million TB patients have been treated in the past 10 years.

To build on these successes, however, we must not be complacent. Eliminating TB will take significant effort, and requires the effective operationalization of the End TB Strategy.

As the Region accelerates its fight against TB, we need to:

- renew political commitment at the highest level,
- focus on better financing to end the TB epidemic, engage all stakeholders including donors, partners, private and public sectors and the community,
- rapidly upgrade care and managerial standards in the region, ensure universal access to high quality TB care, and
- pursue overarching poverty reduction strategies and expand social protection.

The progress in TB control thus far in the Region is testimony to the unwavering commitment of Member States and donors and the tireless efforts of many people, organizations and institutions in the Region. As we embark on this journey, we must all work together to accelerate our efforts and renew our commitment to **“Unite to End TB”**.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Poonam Khetrpal Singh', written in a cursive style.

Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh
Regional Director