National TB Programme Managers and Partners Meeting,

New Delhi, 13-15 May 2019

Regional Director’s Message

Distinguished National TB Programme managers and senior officials from Member States of the South East Asia Region, community representatives, heads of WHO Collaborating Centers, technical and donor partners, WHO colleagues from both headquarters and country offices,

Thank you for attending this Regional Meeting of National TB Control Programme Managers and Partners – an important part of our quest to End TB by or before 2030.

Although our Regional Director, Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, would have liked to attend this meeting, she is unable to due to prior commitments. I therefore take great pleasure in delivering this message on her behalf.

The Regional Director starts by emphasizing the significance of TB’s burden and the Region-wide challenge it poses to public health.

She says around 10 million people across the globe fall ill with TB every year. An estimated 1.6 million lose their lives to the disease.

Notably, around 44% of the world’s TB cases are in our Region, which also accounts for 50% of all TB deaths.

The Regional Director says the theme of this year’s World TB Day – ‘It’s time’ – highlighted an important point: that the drive to End TB has reached a critical phase, both in the Region and globally.

She is also keen to note that high-level commitment across our Region is at a premium.

She is especially pleased that in March 2017, Member States issued a Call for Action, underscoring the political, technical and strategic interventions needed to rout the disease, and that matching this, WHO made ‘accelerating efforts to End TB’ its eighth Regional Flagship
Priority.

Dr Khetrapal Singh observes that in March 2018, at the WHO-supported Delhi End TB Summit, Member States unanimously adopted a Statement of Action pledging to intensify efforts towards ending TB by or before 2030.

Importantly, she says, Member States reaffirmed their commitment during the UN General Assembly's high-level meeting on ending TB and made critical contributions to the Political Declaration and the key targets related to treatment and preventive therapy.

Dr Khetrapal Singh commends Region-wide leadership.

She notes that domestic budgetary allocations across the Region have more than doubled; that new technologies and guidelines are being rapidly adopted; and that case notifications have significantly increased, while TB-associated mortality has been on a downward trajectory.

She says strong efforts are being made by to meet the targets set in the Political Declaration, which, by 2022, require us to diagnose and treat 18 million TB patients Region-wide, including 1.5 million children; to successfully treat 500,000 patients with drug-resistant TB; and to provide preventive treatment to around 12 million people at risk of developing the disease.

The Regional Director emphasizes that critical to achieving these outcomes is adopting a series of key interventions Region-wide.

First among them is active case-finding, especially among high-risk groups. As modelling shows, she says, intensified case finding can dramatically reduce TB incidence. Dr Khetrapal Singh urges participants of this meeting to develop a roadmap on expanding access to cutting-edge diagnostics in finding missing cases and ensuring people-centered treatment and care to all.

The Regional Director also says that a time-bound action plan to cover all groups at risk of developing TB should be developed and implemented. This is especially important given the need to treat latent TB, comorbidities like tobacco use and diabetes, and ensuring that modalities for treatment are easily available.
She says the recently published WHO guidelines on precisely these subjects should be adopted and rapidly rolled-out by all.

The Regional Director also urges all partners to support national TB Programmes in ensuring that the highest quality TB care is available, from drugs to diagnostics. She urges Member States to expand social protection measures, particularly for TB patients, high-risk groups and vulnerable communities, while promoting south-south cooperation in the Region so cutting-edge technologies can be mainstreamed.

Importantly, Dr Khetrapal Singh says, community engagement must be a core priority for all countries, whether low- or high-prevalence. Rather than passively implementing policies that come from above, affected communities should be part of the policy development process, with community recommendations reflected in public health policies.

The Regional Director reiterates the importance she accords this meeting, especially in terms of reviewing progress and finding ways to accelerate it wherever possible.

She urges everyone to be bold, to develop clear plans and commitments and be up front about how technical partners and donors can be of assistance.

Dr Khetrapal Singh assures you of WHO's ongoing support, and our commitment to ensuring that the best TB care, prevention and management is available to all people in the Region.

Distinguished participants,

Alongside these key points, the Regional Director is excited to release the training modules you have with you today, both for what they represent and what they contain.

She says they reflect the input and wisdom of TB-affected communities and activists, as well as policymakers and public health experts from across the Region.

As such, they reflect the outcome of a critically important source of engagement and expertise that has been missing for far too long.
As Dr Khetrapal Singh has said many times before, a medical approach alone will not solve TB. The material provided is aimed at building the capacity of affected communities to meaningfully engage with national programmes at all levels – from planning to implementation and monitoring.

The Regional Director notes that collaboration with and among partners such as the Global Coalition of TB Activists, the Stop TB Partnership and the IFRC must be acknowledged and celebrated. She thanks the many partners and experts that provided crucial input and review.

Dr Khetrapal Singh is certain these modules and the ambition they represent will help you achieve each of your core objectives over the coming days.

She wishes you an engaging and informative meeting and reiterates WHO's steadfast support.

I echo that sentiment and wish you a pleasant stay in New Delhi.

Thank You.