

TITLE: Seventieth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia, Maldives, 6-10 September 2017

SUBTITLE: A Summary Report by the Chairman, H.E. Mr Abdulla Nazim Ibrahim, Minister of Health, Republic of Maldives

PART 1: TOPICS FOR GLOBAL DISCUSSION

- Programme Budget 2018–2019: Resolution SEA/RC70/R2¹ was adopted acknowledging the Seventieth World Health Assembly that endorsed the Programme Budget 2018–2019 for the South-East Asia Region at US\$ 344.3 million. The Region’s Base Budget in Programme Budget 2018–2019 shows a net increase of US\$ 2 million over Programme Budget 2016–17. The Committee was informed that the eight Regional Flagship Areas correlate and link well with the new leadership priorities of the Director-General. Some Member States proposed that the WHO Budget should be used to leverage and tap domestic resources for larger programme implementation. This approach was endorsed by the Director-General.
- Draft Concept Note on the Thirteenth WHO General Programme of Work (GPW): The Committee was informed about the Director-General’s proposed new mission and strategic priorities, development of the draft Concept Note towards WHO’s Thirteenth General Programme of Work (GPW) 2019–2023 and the proposal for an accelerated consultation process leading up to Seventy-first World Health Assembly in May 2018, including a Special Session of the Executive Board on the General Programme of Work to be held on 22–23 November 2017 in Geneva, Switzerland. It was also suggested that, due to the tight timelines for the GPW consultation process, a web-based consultation with Member States be considered. The Committee also requested a special session in the Regional Office to brief Member States about the GPW before the Executive Board briefing, which was agreed to by the Regional Director. The Regional Director stated that the five Leadership Priorities of the Director-General are in conformity with the Flagship Priorities of the Region, and reiterated that in the South-East Asia Region, countries are squarely placed at the centre of all policies and programmes, with 76% of funding allocation in support of countries in the current Programme Budget.
- Implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005): The Committee noted that the Seventieth World Health Assembly endorsed Decision A/70/11 on the implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005), requesting the Director-General to develop a draft five-year Global Strategic Plan to improve public health preparedness and response in time for it to be discussed at the next World Health Assembly in 2018.

¹ <http://www.searo.who.int/mediacentre/events/governance/rc/70/sea-rc70-r2.pdf?ua=1>

The Committee requested that this draft document be prepared in consultation with Member States. The Committee emphasized the underpinning role of WHO leadership and governance. WHO was requested to advocate for IHR to be placed at a higher level of governance mechanism in countries in order to help strengthen the national IHR focal points in collaboration with the many stakeholders. The Committee was informed that the new monitoring and evaluation framework that was part of the Global Strategic Plan has four means of monitoring progress. These are: State Parties annual reports (self-reporting); after action review; JEE; and simulation exercises. Active participation of Member States in the consultations for the Global Strategic Plan for IHR (2005) implementation was encouraged, including the ongoing web consultation till 15 October 2017 and a face-to-face consultation with the Missions in Geneva in the first week of November 2017.

- Vector control: WHO South-East Asia Region bears the highest burden of some vector-borne diseases such as malaria and lymphatic filariasis (LF), and bears one of the highest burdens of dengue. WHO support was requested : (i) to develop or adapt existing national vector control strategies to implement the Global Vector Control Response (GVCR) (ii) to collaborate in developing human resources and training entomologists, provide guidance in research and training for integrated vector control management, and continue collaboration with countries in the field of public health entomology, particularly in research and capacity-building. The Committee welcomed the Regional Action Plan and requested WHO support and collaboration in several aspects of vector control, including surveillance of resistance to insecticides. One WHO publication “*From neglecting to defeating*” was launched.

PART 2: TOPICS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

- Ministerial Roundtable: Resolution [SEA/RC70/R1](#)² endorsed the Malé Declaration on Building Health Systems Resilience to Climate Change and the Framework for Action in Building Health Systems Resilience to Climate Change in the WHO South-East Asia Region, 2017–2022. A report on the progress made would be presented at the Seventy-fifth Session of the Regional Committee. The WHO report entitled “*Status of the development of health national adaptation plan for climate change in the South-East Asia Region*” was launched.
- Programme Budget 2016–2017: Implementation and mid-term review: An overview of the financial situation was presented to the Committee: Programme Budget 2016–2017, together with the WHO mid-term programmatic and financial report for 2016–2017, and the financial and technical aspects of the implementation status as on 8 August 2017. The Committee was informed that under a new approach, resource mobilization would be centralized and Member States would be encouraged to proactively engage with partners and peers to advocate for and mobilize resources for high-impact priorities of the global public health agenda and noted the report.

² <http://www.searo.who.int/mediacentre/events/governance/rc/70/sea-rc70-r1.pdf?ua=1>

- Transparency, accountability, monitoring and evaluation: The Regional Committee was informed of the various initiatives undertaken by the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia to reaffirm and strengthen transparency, accountability, enhanced compliance, risk management and adherence to ethical principles across the Organization. The Committee noted that the Independent Expert Oversight and Advisory Committee (IEOAC) in its report to the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee (PBAC) recognized and appreciated the Region's performance on several indicators, and particularly that the Regional Office had no outstanding internal or external audit recommendations.

The Committee was supportive of the working group recommendations on the alignment of the process of nomination of the Regional Director with that of other regions, and introduction of a Code of Conduct and curriculum vitae in addition to the already existing processes. Through Resolution [SEA/RC70/R3](#)³, the Committee endorsed amendment to the Rule 49 of the Rules of Procedure of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia and Process for the Nomination of the Regional Director for the South-East Asia Region.

- Hepatitis: The Committee welcomed the support of Member States to the Regional Action Plan for Viral Hepatitis in the South-East Asia (SEA) Region (2016–2021), and expressed strong commitment to the SDGs and UHC. The Committee suggested that the SEA Regional Network (SEARN) for access to affordable drugs play a more active role in this area.

The WHO SEA Region Goodwill Ambassador for Hepatitis, Mr Amitabh Bachchan, addressed the Committee via videoconferencing and offered his “voice and face” to spread the word on viral hepatitis. He reiterated his willingness to help in whatever way he could to reduce the burden of hepatitis and spread awareness. The Regional Action Plan for Viral Hepatitis in the South-East Asia Region (2016–2021) was endorsed in the Regional Committee.

- TB: “Bending the Curve”: The Committee noted that the WHO South-East Asia Region bears nearly half the global burden of tuberculosis (TB) in terms of new cases, even though only around 26% of the global population lives in the Region. Achieving the SDG target of ending TB by 2030 would require an urgent and extraordinary response involving the highest level of political commitment, increased funding and a fast-track plan that embraces innovation. Member States expressed their appreciation that addressing TB was now a Regional Flagship Priority. Support was also expressed for the “Delhi Call for Action”, which urges Member States to establish empowered national initiatives, accelerate national efforts to end TB and allocate the required resources. A Resolution [SEA/RC70/R4](#)⁴ was adopted on implementing and monitoring the Delhi Call for Action to End TB in the WHO South-East Asia Region by 2030.

³ <http://www.searo.who.int/mediacentre/events/governance/rc/70/sea-rc70-r3.pdf?ua=1>

⁴ <http://www.searo.who.int/mediacentre/events/governance/rc/70/sea-rc70-r4.pdf?ua=1>

- Access to medicines: Decision SEA/RC70/(1)⁵ requests the Regional Director to CONVENE technical consultations to develop inter-country cooperation on the four priorities, on a voluntary basis: a) share information on medicines prices, building on an existing WHO platform; b) share information on medicines quality, through the functions of the South-East Asia Regulatory Network; c) initiate a concrete collaboration in procurement of antidotes for improved access to these limited supplies of medicines for life-threatening conditions; d) support bilateral cooperation agreements on improved access to medicines; and REPORT progress, achievements and challenges on the implementation of this Decision to the Seventy-third session of the Regional Committee. Member States expressed their willingness to collaborate in promoting access to safe, efficacious, quality and affordable medical products. WHO was urged to engage with all stakeholders to address both innovation and access, including the rising prices of new pharmaceuticals and rapidly changing requirements for health technologies. Five key areas of regional collaboration were highlighted that would help countries to improve access to essential medicines: (a) collaboration on procurement and price transparency; (b) regulatory cooperation through SEARN; (c) increased use of TRIPS flexibilities to improve access to new medicines; (d) expanding efforts to improve the use of antibiotics and effective antimicrobial stewardship; and (e) improving data availability and regular monitoring of progress on access to medicines. Two WHO publications were launched: Improving access to medicines in the South-East Asia Region – progress, challenges, priorities and UHC Technical brief on TRIPS, intellectual property rights and access to medicines.
- Road safety: The Committee noted with concern that in the WHO South-East Asia Region, approximately 316 000 people die each year from road traffic injuries. Of these, 50% are among vulnerable road users (pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists). The Committee noted that in the area of road safety, some Member States reported having established the designated road safety lead agency for working across sectors, as well as a dedicated unit for trauma care, including injuries from road traffic accidents, in their ministries of health. Thailand, in collaboration with the Regional Office, would be hosting a Ministerial Meeting on road safety in Phuket from 29 November to 1 December 2017, and “Safety 2018 World Conference”.
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and progress towards universal health coverage: It was noted that there is increasing recognition of the need to revitalize and reform frontline services to respond to changing health needs – without this, there will not be sustained progress on UHC. The discussion on progress monitoring focused on three issues: (1) what to monitor, and that there are ways now to monitor both dimensions of UHC; (2) how to improve monitoring; and (3) what monitoring is for. The roles of development agencies in supporting national efforts were outlined. Key issues raised included: the importance of revitalizing and adapting frontline services to cope with ageing populations and NCDs, with practical examples.

⁵ <http://www.searo.who.int/mediacentre/events/governance/rc/70/decisions-rc70.pdf?ua=1>

Decision [SEA/RC70\(2\)](#)⁶ adopted requested the Regional Director to Include an “Annual report on monitoring progress on UHC and health-related SDGs as a substantive Agenda item of the Regional Committee until 2030, and Link relevant elements of the health-related SDGs, including UHC, as appropriate, to the topic selected by the host Member State for discussion at the Ministerial Roundtable annually until 2030. One WHO publication, Monitoring health in the sustainable development goals, was launched.

- Status of the SEA Regional Office Building: In keeping with the commitment by the Government of India and the announcement made at the Sixty-ninth session of the Regional Committee, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, confirmed their in-principle funding of USD 35 million approx. for the reconstruction project of the Regional Office Building, and informed that a project implementation agency had been identified and that the necessary approvals were being processed. The Committee welcomed the Secretariat’s Report on the Status of the South-East Asia Regional Office Building, including its Annexes, and the three Options presented therein, and endorsed Option 2 – Redevelopment of the whole campus. The Committee noted with appreciation the progress made by the Secretariat with regard to moving to temporary premises. The committee through Decision [SEA/RC70\(3\)](#)⁷ requested the Regional Director to report on the progress in this matter to the Seventy-first session of the Regional Committee.

⁶ <http://www.searo.who.int/mediacentre/events/governance/rc/70/decisions-rc70.pdf?ua=1>

⁷ <http://www.searo.who.int/mediacentre/events/governance/rc/70/decisions-rc70.pdf?ua=1>