

**Message from Dr Samlee Plianbangchang,
Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia
on the occasion of World Heart Day 2011**



I am pleased to join hands with the All India Heart Foundation to mark World Heart Day 2011. Cardiovascular disease and stroke that includes heart disease, is the world's number one killer claiming 17.3 million lives a year, globally. The World Heart Day theme this year “One World, One Home, One Heart” is intended to remind individuals and families across nations to improve their heart health by choosing healthy lifestyles including eating healthy diet, engaging in regular physical activity, and avoiding tobacco and alcohol use.

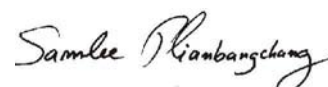
In the WHO South-East Asia Region, cardiovascular diseases cause an estimated 3.6 million deaths annually or almost a quarter of all deaths. Heart diseases are killing people at a relatively younger age in the Region; 27% of all deaths due to heart disease in the Region occur before the age of 60 years compared with 16% in the rest of the world. The majority of heart attacks and strokes are, however, preventable by adopting healthy lifestyles such as eating a healthy diet rich in fruits and vegetables but low in salt and saturated fats and trans fats; being active and engaging daily in at least 30 minutes of mild-to-moderate physical activity; and avoiding tobacco and alcohol use.

Heart diseases have a huge impact on the quality of life of affected individuals and their families and are a major impediment to socioeconomic development at national level. There is clear evidence that the poor are more likely to bear the brunt of heart diseases, largely due to their low awareness of risk factors and lack of timely access to health care. At the household level, cardiovascular diseases contribute to huge out-of-pocket payments leading to catastrophic health-care expenditures, further pushing families into debt and poverty. The price tag of cardiovascular disease is colossal, particularly for developing countries. According to a recent study by the World Economic Forum and the Harvard School of Public Health, the economic burden of cardiovascular diseases in low- and middle- income countries during the period 2011-2025 is estimated to be a staggering US \$ 3.76 trillion.

Globalization, trade and irresponsible marketing are leading to an increase in consumption of processed and unhealthy foods by populations in South-East Asia. We are particularly concerned about the rising trends of obesity among children. Households and schools must take responsibility of creating an enabling environment to ensure that children are given healthy nutrition and options for physical activity. Similarly, the food industry must take responsibility for promoting healthy diets by avoiding irresponsible marketing of unhealthy foods to children.

Creating an enabling environment for behaviour change is paramount for prevention and control of heart disease. In the days to come, coalitions and alliances should be built in multiple sectors through shared vision, pooled resources and greater harmonization of action among key stakeholders.

On the occasion of World Heart Day 2011, I am pleased to reaffirm the strong commitment of WHO to work together with the World Heart Federation, and with other relevant partners to prevent heart diseases. I wish the All India Heart Foundation and other stakeholders and partners all success in their endeavours to prevent and control heart disease.



Dr Samlee Plianbangchang
Regional Director