Internal WHO Coordination Meeting for Tsunami-Affected Countries

Welcome Address

by

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Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

- It has been more than two months since the tragedy of the earthquake that resulted in the Tsunami on 26 December 2004.
- The disaster has left countless dead; and millions more homeless with their lives shattered.
- This was really unprecedented in terms of geographical areas affected, and the severity of its devastation.
- WHO’s response was also unprecedented, as far as coordination, management and logistics are concerned.
- Human resources had to be mobilized from everywhere in the Organization, as well as from outside.
- We, in SEARO, had worked closely with HQ, particularly the Department of Health Action in Crises, in developing a platform for WHO’s response.
- More than 200 professionals of various disciplines have been deployed for WHO operations in the Tsunami-affected countries.
WHO had mounted flash appeal to donors for 67 million US$ for financing its emergency operations, which have to be completed within 6 months.

We have to move very fast to accomplish our tasks in time, otherwise it is likely that funds will not flow in as expected.

It is like a "mission impossible".

However, we should look at it as a challenge to our capacity to deal with a crisis of this magnitude.

We must try hard to succeed in our work in this mission.

As we can see, this work is for the Organization as a whole.

If we fail, it will be the failure of the Organization.

We must also realize, at the same time, that donors are very concerned with our accountability in the use of their contributions.

We have to be ready to demonstrate in the most transparent manner our accountability, in both financial and technical terms.

We are here to take stock of our experiences during the past two months, identifying our strengths and shortcomings.

We will find solutions together for the problems and constraints facing us.

It is our organizational responsibility to steer our concerted action towards a common purpose during the next four months, keeping in mind the very difficult situation, both technically and politically.

To effectively respond to the needs of the countries during the initial stage of the crisis, we have to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of our operations, especially in the coordination of technical resources, from both within and outside WHO.
• Specifically, during the course of this meeting we will clarify the process for implementation of the workplans of the flash appeals.

• We need to gain consensus on such workplans; consensus on management guidelines and procedures; and consensus on the tools for implementation, using the project approach.

• In this connection, I would like to point out that our regular management styles may not be able to serve the purpose of emergency operations of this magnitude.

• There is a need to find innovative ways and means of working to ensure that we can accomplish our tasks on time and effectively.

• WHO Country Offices have to continue to be the focal points at the country level under the leadership of WHO Representatives.

• The WRs will have to continue to ensure the most efficient and effective use at the country level of all available resources at their disposal, especially expertise which comes from various sources.

• Please keep in mind that under this type of operations, no office can work alone.

• The Country Office has to get help from the Regional Office, and the Regional Office has to get help from HQ and other Regional Offices.

• To be effective, we have to depend on each other.

• Therefore, the spirit of cooperation among these offices is of paramount importance.

• This spirit will only come from our common concern with, and our common understanding of the situation that we are facing together.
• I can state that such a spirit within the Organization has been strongly evident since the beginning of this catastrophe, despite some difficulties in the process.

• Now, we are looking at the way forward, whereby our unified direction and united force will assist us all in this challenging work.

• Again, every disaster presents opportunities to improve the health of people.

• Together, we must seize this opportunity to further develop our technical capacity in disaster preparedness and response; and in supporting the countries in reviving and strengthening the health system infrastructure that was devastated by the Tsunami disaster.

Colleagues,

• I look forward to our productive deliberations and fruitful conclusions.

• Thank you.