

Title: Seventy-eighth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 13-15 October 2025

Subtitle: A summary report by the Chair, His Excellency Dr Nalinda Jayatissa, Minister of Health and Mass Media of the Government of Sri Lanka

Introduction

The Seventy-eighth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for SE Asia was held in person over three days on 13–15 October 2025. The Committee adopted special procedures (decision SEA/RC78(1))¹, including discussing four agenda items under a Written Silence procedure and temporarily suspending Rule 19 on the adoption of the Session report immediately after the plenary.

His Excellency Mr Abdulla Nazim Ibrahim, Minister of Health, Ministry of Health, Government of the Republic of Maldives, and His Excellency Mr Tandin Wangchuk, Minister of Health, Ministry of Health, Royal Government of Bhutan were elected as two Vice-Chairpersons by the Committee. Dr S. Sridharan, Deputy Director General (Planning), Ministry of Health and Mass Media, Government of Sri Lanka and Mr Tashi Penjor, Chief Planning Officer, Policy and Planning Division, Ministry of Health, Royal Government of Bhutan, co-chaired the Drafting Group for resolutions and decisions. Ms Aminath Shaina Abdullah, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Health, Government of the Republic of Maldives, was appointed Rapporteur of this Drafting Group. The Committee adopted eight decisions and ten resolutions.

Part 1: Topics for global discussion

- **Programme Budget 2024–2025: implementation and mid-term review**

The Committee reviewed the mid-term Results Report for Programme Budget 2024–2025 and financial implementation (up to September 2025) in the WHO South-East Asia Region. It urged maximizing resource generation and ensuring equitable distribution. Four countries — Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Timor-Leste — committed to joint monitoring and reporting for the 2022–2023 biennium assessment.

- **Programme Budget 2026–2027**

The Committee noted the reduced Programme Budget 2026–2027 is fully aligned with GPW14, focuses on health equity, resilient systems, and sustainable financing. It was briefed on regional restructuring, including significant staff cuts at the Regional Office and sustainable reductions at country level to preserve capacity. A Resolution SEA/RC78/R2² was adopted for this agenda item.

- **Review of the Draft Provisional Agenda of the 158th Session of the WHO Executive Board** (Written Silence procedure)

The Committee noted the Draft Provision Agenda of EB158 and also India's proposal to include "Strengthening human resources for health for resilient and equitable health systems" in the same. It supported the submission and urged the SE Asia Region's Executive Board members to support it.

¹ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/364e27e7-7659-4b2a-826a-a9a9f74fbe04/content>

² <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/dfd2703f-006c-4b88-9451-6d0670f22144/content>

- **Process for the nomination and appointment of Regional Directors**

The Committee adopted a decision (SEA/RC78(2))³ on “Process for the Nomination of the Regional Director”. The desired criteria for assessing candidates for the post of the Regional Director, arrangements for a candidates’ forum wherein candidates have an opportunity to present their views, and an amended Code of Conduct for the Nomination of the Regional Director of the SE Asia Region, were also adopted. The Committee also decided to establish a Regional Evaluation Group comprising of independent experts nominated by Member States of the Region, on a pilot basis, for the nomination of the next Regional Director.

- **Amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia**

The Committee adopted a decision (SEA/RC78(3))⁴ to amend the Rules of Procedure of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia, to align with the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board and of the World Health Assembly and with the Rules of Procedure of the other Regional Committees. It also included amendment to the modalities for the presentation process for the nomination of the Regional Director.

Part 2: Topics of regional significance

- **Healthy Ageing through strengthened primary health care – Ministerial Roundtable:**

At this Ministerial Roundtable, the Committee adopted the Colombo Declaration on Healthy Ageing through strengthened primary health care (SEA/RC78/R1⁵), addressing the Region’s rapid demographic transition. Member States committed to combating ageism, creating age-friendly environments, integrating person-centred care, and expanding long-term care. The Committee requested WHO to continue providing technical support, capacity-building, and resource mobilization to ensure older persons lead healthy, dignified, and independent lives.

- **Annual report on monitoring progress on UHC and health-related SDGs**

The Committee endorsed the findings and recommendations of the 10th Annual UHC and SDG Progress Report and reaffirmed Decision SEA/RC70(1) to continue annual reporting until 2030. The Committee noted that high out-of-pocket (OOP) expenditure as a continuing concern, calling for stronger financial protection and health financing reforms. The Committee endorsed a resolution (SEA/RC78/R3)⁶.

- **Expanding the corpus of the South-East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund (SEARHEF)**

The Committee adopted the updated Policies and Business Rules for SEARHEF 2.0, to be implemented from the 2026–2027 biennium and requested the Regional Director to develop and operationalize a comprehensive partnership and resource mobilization strategy to ensure sustainability of the fund. A decision (SEA/RC78(5))⁷ was adopted on this agenda item.

³ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/8740818d-f33e-4e69-894c-2c73c261de9f/content>

⁴ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/43b4357e-fe42-4fe7-afa2-8b6b85a4f1ab/content>

⁵ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/83bc67dd-56de-4603-a94c-a633ffcea883/content>

⁶ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/9e13d87e-378e-4cb4-8287-08f9d10485a5/content>

⁷ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/b42f7353-66a3-4e3b-82b8-4f13772558c1/content>

- **Aligning regional policy actions with global commitments: Accelerating the fight against AMR in the WHO South-East Asia Region**

The Committee endorsed Regional AMR Roadmap 2025–2030 aligned with WHA and UNGA commitments, to address antimicrobial resistance as a critical health and socioeconomic threat. Member States pledged stronger One Health collaboration, surveillance via the Global Antimicrobial Resistance and Use Surveillance System (GLASS)⁸, rational antimicrobial use, and sustainable financing. Key priorities include governance, laboratory capacity, regulation, and integration with UHC and PHC. A resolution SEA/RC78/R4⁹ was adopted to accelerate AMR action across the region.

- **Regional Strategic Framework for combating smokeless tobacco, novel nicotine products and areca nut in the WHO South-East Asia Region**

The Committee acknowledged the urgent need for evidence-based, multisectoral and legally robust measures to regulate and, where appropriate, prohibit smokeless tobacco, electronic cigarettes, nicotine pouches and areca nut. The Committee adopted resolution SEA/RC78/R5¹⁰ on this agenda item.

- **Progress reports on selected Regional Committee resolutions**

Under this agenda, the Committee noted progress reports on nine past Regional Committee resolutions or decisions on important agendas including climate change, SEAHEARTS (CVD), measles and rubella elimination, school health promotion and health promotion schools, improvement of civil registration and vital statistic (CRVS), promoting physical activity, emergency preparedness, strengthening primary health care and improving access to essential medical products. The Committee adopted 4 resolutions and 3 decisions on these agendas:

- a) Decision SEA/RC78(6)¹¹ on strengthening climate resilience in health systems in the Region, urging Member States to put health at the heart of climate action, calls upon stakeholders to collaborate in developing and implementing joint action plans and resource mobilization strategy and requests the Secretariat to convene consultation for aligning the regional and global action plans;
- b) Decision SEA/RC78(7)¹² on extending and expanding the Regional Milestones of SEAHEARTS¹³ to 2030 and requesting the Secretariat to support Member States in developing national and subnational roadmaps with targets for the implementation of related WHO technical packages;
- c) Resolution SEA/RC78/R6¹⁴ on implementation of the global standards and regional roadmap on health promoting schools in the Region, urging Member States to institutionalize comprehensive school health programmes aligned with PHC and UHC and integrate adolescent-responsive interventions into national health and education plans and frameworks;

⁸ [Global Antimicrobial Resistance and Use Surveillance System \(GLASS\)](https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/80894bd3-abd9-44c2-85a4-6e9a5759398f/content)

⁹ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/5c7bcd02-72f8-4246-a895-f1aca52ad39f/content>

¹⁰ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/848e5389-c86f-4304-bd2a-e04a39d4578e/content>

¹¹ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/a87a3112-838b-4800-8fb2-6cd767fbeb5c/content>

¹² <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/a87a3112-838b-4800-8fb2-6cd767fbeb5c/content>

¹³ SEAHEARTS: an initiative to reduce CVD burden in the WHO South-East Asia Region. New Delhi:

WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia. <https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/searo/ncd/seahearts-reducecardiovascular-disease-burden-in-the-sear.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/490bbbfc-fc24-43a9-83f1-94f866ccd1a9/content>

- d) Resolution SEA/RC78/R7¹⁵ on bolstering the critical role of CRVS in advancing UHC and evidence-based governance urging Member States to strengthen CRVS governance, accelerate digital integration with health and ID systems, update legal frameworks for universal registration, invest in infrastructure and ICT, promote public awareness, enhance data use for vital statistics, and empower health sector roles;
- e) Decision SEA/RC78(8)¹⁶ on promoting physical activity in the Region extending the timeline of the resolution SEA/RC69/R4 till 2030 (another five year from 2025) and requesting the Secretariat to support Member States in enabling and promoting physical activity programmes based on the four pillars of the Global Action Plan on physical activity 2018–2030;
- f) Resolution SEA/RC78/R8¹⁷ on emergency preparedness in the Region urging Member States to strengthen multisectoral coordination for emergency preparedness, enhance access to emergency medical care through EMTs, develop HEOC-NET for better response, invest in health sector resilience aligned with SDGs, and implement the revised International Health Regulations (2005), as amended in 2024, to build collective regional resilience.
- g) Resolution SEA/RC78/R9¹⁸ on introducing health humanities to health professional education and training in the Region, urging Member States to integrate health humanities into health professional education and service delivery, foster innovation and research on its role, and share experiences regionally and globally to build compassionate, culturally sensitive, and ethical health systems.

• **Status of the SE Asia Regional Office Building**

The Committee noted the progress on reconstructing the SE Asia Regional Office Building in New Delhi. The Director-General thanked the Government of India for its support and invited other Member States to the joint inauguration during the Second WHO Traditional Medicine Global Summit, to be held in New Delhi, 17–19 December 2025.

• **Time and place of future Sessions of the Regional Committee**

The Committee welcomed with appreciation the invitation from the Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste and decided to hold its Seventy-ninth Session in Timor-Leste from 7 to 10 September 2026¹⁹. The Committee also welcomed with appreciation the invitation from the Government of the Republic of Maldives to host its Eightieth Session in 2027.

In a Side-event during the Regional Committee, Nepal, Maldives and Timor-Leste were felicitated for their Public Health Achievements. Also, the Female Community Health Volunteers (Nepal), LEPRAS Society (India) and Dr Satendra Singh (India) were awarded the SE Asia Regional Award for Public Health Champions.

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¹⁵ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/3c3c57c3-53b3-4bf3-906b-5029eff83f15/content>

¹⁶ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/545d7910-d82b-46fa-a9ec-e82e839f0b5f/content>

¹⁷ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/b70b42a8-b079-48a3-bdd7-1ffff7b79f1b/content>

¹⁸ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/d675b23f-e78e-446f-a786-3acd74eb34f3/content>

¹⁹ <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/36c22319-048d-4984-a807-0ea865b721cc/content>