South East Asia Regional One Voice (RoV) statement delivered by Bhutan during the 74th World Health Assembly

Agenda Item 23 **'WHO global plan of action to strengthen the role of the health system within a national multisectoral response to address interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children'**

Thank you, Madam Chair!

Bhutan has the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the SEAR member states.

We note with concern that the recently updated prevalence estimates demonstrate that violence against women and girls, and against children remain unacceptably high globally. We are concerned that interpersonal violence is exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. Violence against women (VAW), aptly termed as the 'Shadow Pandemic' by the United Nations, is worsening as the pandemic continues.

Like other regions, the SEA region has witnessed a surge in violence against women, girls and children during the pandemic. While social measures like stay-at-home orders enforced to protect the public and prevent widespread infection, it has left many victims trapped with their abusers. In light of disruption in essential health care services including sexual and reproductive health care services, the health of women, girls and children are being adversely affected.

Our region has made varying degrees of progress in implementing health system actions to address violence. In view of the current context, addressing interpersonal violence are part of COVID-19 response and preparedness plans in some member states. The WHO's guidance documents and advocacy briefs on this issue have been useful to shape actions at country

level. Thus, we commend WHO's work in bringing out these briefs and documents in a timely manner.

Chair,

SEAR welcomes the strategic move to develop the five-year blueprint to accelerate the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5.2 on elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, which WHO is co-leading. We urge WHO to work with the conviction that extraordinary efforts are required to ensure that Member States will be able to achieve this goal by 2030.

As for continuing our efforts in promoting the adoption and implementation of the evidence-based approaches set out in the WHO global plan of action, awareness programmes that engage multi sectors as well as the communities need to be intensified among member states. However, budget to address this is still underfunded. SEAR Member States urge WHO to give more focussed attention by initiating a high level dialogue that can be taken up at 75th WHA and through adequate budget allocation within the programme to prevent and respond to violence against women, girls and children.

Finally, health facility settings should be a safe place, not only for victims but also for health personnel and patients. We emphasize on zero tolerance to all forms of violence in healthcare settings.

Thank you!