Thailand Written Statement on
Agenda 34.1 Progress Report - B: Prevention of deafness and hearing loss
(resolution WHA 70.13(2017))

Deaf and people with hard of hearing might not be the most prevalent group of people with disabilities, yet they are among the most vulnerable. 3.2% of Thai population are disabled, among this almost 20% are those with hearing impairment. However, according to the latest disability survey in Thailand, people with hearing difficulty are the least in entering higher education system.

In terms of medical aspect, Thailand has always determined in preventing deafness and hearing loss. We have managed to reduce the hearing loss from chronic otitis media during the past decade. The interventions to improve hearing ability such as cochlear Implant, hearing rehabilitation and hearing aids have already been included in the universal health coverage. However, certain challenges still exist.

First, the lack of human resources and equipment prevents the coverage of the newborn hearing screening program countrywide. There is only 185 audiologists and 199 speech and language therapists in the country. Moreover, the inequal distribution of the staff worsens the situation in the rural area. The strategy on increasing the audiology professionals and training of substituted staff, eg. nurse, is vital. Besides, to achieve the effective service, it is not only the number of therapists that matters, their understanding of deaf culture is also indispensable.

Second, the country-level statistics of hearing loss is not collected regularly. This impedes the monitoring system of the problem. The registry is still in planning process.

Third, owing to the aforementioned problems on human resource and the monitoring system, other significant causes of hearing loss, such as occupational or recreational hearing loss, is still not strategically managed.

All in all, Thailand appreciates the development of the World Report on hearing which could serve as a basis for the country-level plan. We would like to advocate for the integration of hearing care in the universal health coverage and urge every member state to develop the healthcare system that is accessible for people with hearing impairment. Lastly, it would be beneficial if WHO could support the agenda through the monitoring system on the number of hearing-related healthcare professionals.