Thank you Chair,

Bangladesh delivers this statement on behalf of the 11 WHO Member States of the South East Asia Region.

What we have learned from the COVID-19 is the “uncertainty”. Despite being well planned, situation can change at any time. We must be prepared to respond to new challenges emerging under the rapidly changing situation.

It is unfortunate that preparedness and responses to COVID-19 were mostly on physical health. Mental health was less prioritized area.

While COVID-19 pandemic has major consequences on mental health and psychosocial well-being of all people, the impacts of the pandemic on mental health is not specifically recognized. For instance, the WHO’s strategic preparedness and response plan for COVID-19 has not specified any strategies to address mental health needs from COVID-19.

Our Region sees the need for Member States to include mental health preparedness and response in public health emergencies response, focusing on early mental health communication, mental health information system, and community resilience. These include the whole range of comprehensive and integrated mental health services and psychosocial support, including promotion, prevention, early detection, treatment and rehabilitation, and promoting mental health literacy and awareness. in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. However, we should not pay attention to only short-term services as the long-term demand emerges long after the event.
In addition, WHO should strengthen Member States on implementation of the Global Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030 in context of public health emergencies.

Chair,

Bangladesh would like to introduce draft decision on “Promoting Mental Health Preparedness and Response for Public Health Emergencies”. This draft decision is co-sponsored by Argentina, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brazil, Canada, Guyana, Indonesia, Maldives, Myanmar, Norway, Peru, Qatar, Switzerland, Thailand, United States of America and the Member States of the European Union. In addition, we are glad to further inform EB Members that Chile also cosponsor this draft decision. We recognize Thailand’s leadership in developing this document during the three rounds of informal consultation. We acknowledge hard work of the Secretariat in supporting the process of development of the draft. We also highly appreciate Member States for their contribution by highlighting the importance of mental health aspect in the time of the pandemic.

The draft decision will be the important tool toward strengthening capacity of the Member States on mental health preparedness and response for the public health emergencies, especially for this COVID-19 pandemic, to better protect physical and mental health of all people.

Thank you, Chair.