

The Third High-Level Officials' Meeting

8 August, 2007



World Health Organization

Regional Initiative on Environment and Health



United Nations Environment Programme

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**High-Level Officials' Meeting
on Environment and Health
in Southeast and East Asian Countries
8 August 2007, Bangkok, Thailand**

MEETING REPORT

I. INTRODUCTOIN

1. The Third High-Level Officials Meeting on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian countries was held in Bangkok, Thailand on 8 August 2007. The First High-Level Officials Meeting was held in Manila, Philippines in November 2004, where a regional initiative on environment and health was launched, and the Second High-Level Officials Meeting was convened in Bangkok, Thailand in December 2005, where a draft Charter of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health was discussed. This Third Meeting was conducted prior to the First Ministerial Meeting, to review the progress made in national and regional actions since the Second High-Level Meeting, and discuss and endorse the draft Charter and the composition and work plans of the regional Thematic Working Groups (TWGs) on six priorities for submission to the Ministerial Meeting. The agenda and annotated agenda of the meeting are given in Annexes 1 and 2, respectively, and a list of participants is attached as Annex 3.

II. OPENING SESSION (Agenda Item 1)

2. The opening session was addressed by Mr. Surendra Shrestha, Regional Director, UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, Dr Shigeru Omi, Regional Director, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, and Dr Supat Wangwongwatana, Director-General, Pollution Control Department, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand.
3. Mr. Shrestha mentioned how the regional initiative on environment and health had been developed since November 2004, and that UNEP attached importance to the regional initiative. He expressed his appreciation to WHO for jointly organizing the Ministerial Regional Forum, and to the Ministries of Natural Resources and Environment and Public Health, Thailand and the Chulabhorn Research Institute (CRI) for hosting the Forum. He then introduced other speakers.
4. Dr. Omi welcomed the participants to the third High-Level Officials Meeting on behalf of both the WHO Regional Offices for South-East Asia and the Western Pacific. He stated that Asian countries faced three types of environmental health challenges: poor basic environmental sanitation; increasing environmental pollution; and emerging global environmental changes. He then elaborated on the actions that should be taken to address the issues of climate change at three fronts: policy, technology and individual behaviour. Considering that environmental risks to health cause 6.6 million deaths per year in the Asia Pacific region, or a quarter of the total deaths in the region, and these environmental risks are mostly man-made and thus can be avoided, Dr Omi stressed that urgent action by all parties, particularly health and environment sectors, was needed.
5. Dr. Supat welcomed all participants to Bangkok, and to the High-Level Officials Meeting, on behalf of the Government of Thailand. He stated that the Government of Thailand attached a great importance to

environmental health issues arising from rapid economic development taking place in the country, and was willing to share experiences and solutions with other countries in the region through forums, such as this one. He then thanked UNEP and WHO for organizing the Ministerial Regional Forum.

III. Election of Officers (Agenda Item 2)

6. Mr. Shrestha then suggested that the meeting elect a Chair and Vice-Chair to guide the rest of the proceedings. Mr Ken Choviran, Ministry of Environment, Cambodia proposed Thailand to be the Chair and the Republic of Korea to be the Vice-Chair of the meeting. The proposal was seconded by Dr Lokman Hakim bin Sulaiman, Institute for Medical Research, Ministry of Health, Malaysia, and accepted by the meeting. Dr Supat Wangwongwatana, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand and Mr Shin Boo Nam, Ministry of Environment, Republic of Korea then assumed as the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the meeting, respectively.

IV. REVIEW OF REGIONAL LEVEL ACTIVITIES (Agenda Item 3)

7. A review of regional level actions since the Second High-Level Officials Meeting was presented jointly by Dr. Hisashi Ogawa, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific and Mr. Mylvakanam Iyngararasan, UNEP Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific. They covered the development of the draft Charter of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health and establishment of Thematic Working Groups (TWGs). The presentation is given in Annex 4.
8. Having been discussed at the Second High-Level Officials Meeting, the draft Charter was sent to the participating countries for further review and comments. These comments were then incorporated into the revised draft which was sent to the participating countries, together with invitation letters to the First Ministerial Regional Forum for final review.
9. The final draft Charter contains six environment and health priorities over the next three years, namely:
 - air quality
 - water supply, hygiene and sanitation
 - solid and hazardous waste
 - toxic chemicals and hazardous substances
 - climate change, ozone depletion and ecosystem change
 - contingency planning, preparedness and response to environmental health emergencies
10. The draft Charter also lays out institutional arrangements for the implementation of work plans in the priority areas. The institutional arrangements include Ministerial Regional Forum, High-Level Official Forum, Advisory Board, TWGs, and Secretariat.
11. A regional Thematic Working Group has been established for each priority area. Each of the working groups includes more than 20 institutions and additional institutions could be included as appropriate. Following are the Chairs of the various TWGs:
 - Korea Environmental Health Forum, Republic of Korea and Pollution Control Department, Thailand for the TWG on air quality;
 - Institute for Environmental Health and Related Product Safety, Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, China for the TWG on water supply, hygiene and sanitation
 - Ministry of Environment, Japan for the TWG on solid and hazardous waste
 - Ministry of Public Health, Thailand for the TWG on toxic chemicals and hazardous substances

- Ministry of Environment, Indonesia for the TWG on climate change, ozone depletion and ecosystem change
- Department of Health, Philippines for the TWG on contingency planning, preparedness and response to environmental health emergencies

12. The meeting discussed and endorsed the draft final Charter and the composition and Chairs of the TWGs for submission to the Ministerial Meeting for formal adoption.

V. REVIEW OF NATIONAL LEVEL ACTIVITIES (Agenda Item 3)

13. Representatives from all the participating countries presented the progress in the national level activities on environment and health since the Second High-Level Officials Meeting. Most countries have organized national forums on environment and health regularly, or have established a good coordinating mechanism between the health and environment sectors.

14. All countries reported substantial progress made to address their priority environmental health issues, including water supply and sanitation; indoor and outdoor air quality management; environmental health impact assessment; management of toxic chemicals; and solid and hazardous waste management. All the presentations are given in Annex 5.

15. With respect to the development of National Environmental Health Action Plan (NEHAP), Mongolia has developed a government-endorsed national environmental health programme with an action plan, and many other countries (i.e. Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Thailand and Viet Nam) have completed draft NEHAPs and are now working on further revision or final government endorsement. Indonesia, Japan and Singapore already have national plans equivalent to NEHAPs, and have no intention to prepare a separate NEHAP. Brunei Darussalam and Myanmar are still in the process of developing their NEHAPs.

16. The meeting noted the progress made at the national level.

VI. WORK PLANS OF THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS (Agenda Item 4)

17. Since the establishment of the various TWGs with original member institutions in September 2006, the development of 3-year work plans had been coordinated by the Interim Chair institutions. Generic guidelines for the development of a work plan had been provided by the Secretariat.

18. At the meeting, the Interim Chair institutions made presentations on their respective work plans. Each presentation covered environment and health linkages, objectives of the work plan, proposed activities with time table, expected outputs, and required resources for the implementation of the work plan. All the TWG work plans and their members are given in Annex 6, and their presentations in Annex 7.

19. The meeting discussed and endorsed the work plans as prepared by the TWGs for submission to the Ministerial Meeting for formal adoption.

VII. DISCUSSION ON "BANGKOK DECLARATION ON ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH" (Agenda Item 5)

20. The meeting discussed the documentation of main outcomes of the First Ministerial Regional Forum, and agreed to produce a declaration, called "Bangkok Declaration on Environment and Health", by the Ministerial Meeting.

21. The meeting then reviewed a draft Bangkok Declaration on Environment and Health which had been prepared by the Secretariat. The meeting made some changes on the draft, noted a need to change the format of the document, and endorsed it with appropriate amendments by the Secretariat for submission to the Ministerial Meeting.

VIII. CLOSING REMARKS (Agenda Item 6)

22. Dr. Supat Wongwangwatana, Chair of the High-Level Officials Meeting expressed his appreciation to all the participants for their active participation in completing all the agenda successfully. He also thanked UNEP and WHO, Secretariat of the meeting for their support during the meeting. Dr. Supat then officially closed the Third High-Level Officials Meeting.