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English Only

**THIRD MINISTERIAL REGIONAL
FORUM ON ENVIRONMENT AND
HEALTH IN SOUTHEAST AND
EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES**
9-10 September 2013, Kuala Lumpur,
Malaysia

Report of the Seventh High Level Officials' Meeting

Introduction

1. The Seventh High Level Officials' Meeting on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian countries was jointly organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Offices for the Western Pacific (WPRO) and South-East Asia (SEARO), and hosted by the Government of the Malaysia on 9 September 2013 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The meeting was attended by high-level officials from health and environment agencies from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Thailand, and Viet Nam as well as representatives from international and regional partners. The meeting was Chaired by the Government of Malaysia, Dato' Halimah Hassan, Director General, Department of Environment, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment; and Datuk Dr. Noor Hisham Abdullah, Director General of Health, Ministry of Health, Malaysia.
2. Dr Han Tieru, Director, Programme Management, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific welcomed the participants of the Seventh Meeting of High-Level Officials of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian Countries. He thanked the Government of Malaysia for hosting the meeting and for the hard work that has gone into the preparation of the meeting. Since the launching of the forum in 2007, the meeting presented an opportunity to sharpen focus and streamline the forum mechanism to better serve Member Countries. The interplay between health, environment, and development issues continues to be a matter of priority concern in and among countries in Southeast and East Asia, particularly in the context of their rapidly growing economies. The recommendations of the draft report of the Chair and Vice-Chair and the proposed reformulation of the charter of the regional forum would move in a positive, action-oriented direction. He underlined the core of the draft revised charter is its vision statement: "Health and environment at the centre of development." Noticeably, the complex environment, health, and development issues in the Region cannot be resolved by one country or organization. He also thanked secretariat partners from WHO Regional Office for the Southeast Asia and United Nations Environment Programme for their collaboration in providing secretariat support to the forum and the thematic working groups for their contributions to the evidence base that underpins WHO work.

3. Mr Jonathan Gilman, Regional Coordinator, Inter-Agency and Country Level Coordination, UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific stated that the high level officials meeting and ministerial meeting are potentially a very significant milestone in the Regional forum's history. Member states will have an opportunity to review and revise the governance structure of the Forum based on the lessons learned and experience gained since the Forum was established in 2007. He stressed that discussion of the the documents tabled is to ensure that the Forum provides a space and mechanism that allows member states to strengthen national and regional environment and health capacity, planning and implementation. He emphasized that the process of reviewing and potentially strengthening the Forum is very much in line with the Rio+20 outcome document "The future We Want], which notes that regional frameworks are critical for sustainable development as means to complement and facilitate the translation of policies into concrete actions at the national level. He noted that the proposed revised charter provides for flexibility in the governance structure so that the Forum can respond to emerging priorities and needs of member states. He further added that UNEP would also like to encourage increased interaction of the Forum with other relevant regional institutions and fora as a means to more effectively coordinate international cooperation in the area of environment and health.

Scientific presentation: Why do Ecosystems Matter to Human Health?

4. Prof essor Emeritus Dato' Sri Dr Zakri Abdul Hamid, Scientific Advisor to Prime Minister of Malaysia presented a topic on ecosystems and human health. The scientific presentation acknowledged the close relationship between health, the environment, and development, as well as the need to improve health in order to achieve sustainable development. Poverty eradication and economic development cannot be achieved where there is a high prevalence of illnesses. The health of the population cannot be sustained without responsive health systems, a healthy environment, and an intact life-support system. Efforts to protect the health of the environment need to be closely linked to programmes to protect the health of people. Priority areas such as water, energy, health, agriculture, and biodiversity still remain as the greatest global challenges facing the world.

Report of the Regional Forum activities since the Second Ministerial Regional Forum

5. The Joint Secretariat presented the Report of the Regional Forum activities since the Second Ministerial Regional Forum. The presentation and ensuing discussion included the activities of the Task Force, and the process for the revision of the Charter of the Regional Forum.

Experience of European Environment and Health Process

The experience of the European Environment and Health Process was presented by Dr Srdan Matic, Coordinator, Environment and Health WHO Office in Denmark . The 25-year process leading to the commitment to act shows that: environmental risks are still a major source of disease; the health sector has a key role to play in advocating health in all policies, while the environment sector has the key role in placing health objectives high on its agenda; inter-sectorial work presents opportunities and challenges; multilateral processes are highly beneficial for individual Member States and for the community of nations; multilateral legally binding and voluntary frameworks are powerful drivers of the improvement of both environment and health for common good.

Report on Governance, Impact, Partnerships and Sustainable Financial Mechanism

1. The meeting endorsed the report on governance, impact, partnerships, and sustainable financial mechanism of the Regional Forum by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health, taking into account the following recommendations and observations:
 - The Forum should be country-driven in identifying specific pressing issues and ensure that the contributions to the Forum will be used to tackle them.
 - Include the preparation of scientific conferences as part of the Forum activities.
 - Explore experiences on financial mechanisms implemented in similar initiatives in other regions and options for cooperation with the private sector and multilateral development banks.
 - The Forum is voluntary in nature; it is not legally binding as it aims to enhance cooperation.
 - Knowledge networks are appreciated as a part of the new structure of the Forum, aiming to address the necessity for knowledge-based policy making.

Revised Charter of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health

2. The meeting endorsed the draft Revised Charter of the Regional Forum taking into account amendments and observations made, such as:
 - Inclusion of more multilateral agreements related to environment and health in the preamble.
 - Establish the mechanism for the election of the Vice Chair of the Forum without linking its role to the hosting of the upcoming Ministerial Regional Forum.
 - Include the determination of priority areas among the functions of the Ministers of Environment and Ministers of Health.
 - Nominate and update the National Communication Focal Points.
 - The terms of reference of the Secretariat should also include the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Charter over the triennium. This will require the commitment and collaboration of member countries.
 - Include occupational health, water supply, and sanitation issues in the preamble, in a cross sectorial cooperation perspective.
 - The draft Revised Charter will be named Framework for Cooperation until all countries receive the necessary clearance or ratification for naming it a Charter.
 - The transition from the current Charter to the Framework for Cooperation will require an adjustment time among member countries and the Secretariat will lead the roadmap to the full implementation of the Framework.

Preparation of the Third Ministerial Meeting and Kuala Lumpur Declaration

3. The meeting discussed, amended, and endorsed the Third Ministerial Meeting agenda and draft Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Environment and Health for formal approval by the Third Ministerial Meeting of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian Countries.

Closing of the meeting

4. The meeting was closed by Datuk Dr. Noor Hisham Abdullah, Director General of Health, Ministry of Health, Malaysia.