

The First Ministerial Regional Forum

9 August, 2007



World Health Organization

Regional Initiative on Environment and Health



United Nations Environment Programme

MF 1/7

English Only

**Ministerial Regional Forum
on Environment and Health
in Southeast and East Asian Countries
9 August 2007, Bangkok, Thailand**

MEETING REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The First Ministerial Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian countries was held in Bangkok, Thailand on 9 August 2007. The forum 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 and South-East Asia, and hosted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and Ministry of Public Health, Government of Thailand and the Chulabhorn Research Institute (CRI). The forum was attended by Environment and Health Ministers from fourteen Southeast and East Asian countries including Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The agenda and annotated agenda of the forum are given in Annexes 1 and 2, respectively, and a list of participants is enclosed in Annex 3.
2. Following the election result in the third High-Level Officials' Meeting, the Government of Thailand served as the Chairperson and the Government of Korea served as the Vice-Chairperson for the First Ministerial Regional Forum.

II. OPENING SESSION (Agenda Item 1)

3. The First Ministerial Regional Forum was started with opening remarks from WHO, UNEP, the Government of Thailand and Professor Dr. HRH Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol.
4. Dr. Samlee Plianbangchang, Regional Director of WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia, during his opening remarks, stated the significance of the forum which would promote partnership on environment and health to ensure safe and healthy environment. Calling upon recent findings on health concerns largely attributed to environmental issues, he stressed the needs for cooperation among sectors and countries in a concerted manner and wished a success of the meeting.
5. Mr. Surendra Shrestha, Regional Director of UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, during the opening remark, emphasized two broad challenges of the region: rapid economic industrialization of the region; and emerging issues such as atmospheric brown cloud, dust and sandstorms. As these issues pose challenges for environment and health, he highlighted importance of the forum to promote better utilization of policies and technologies to address the challenges as a milestone of partnership for environment and health. He expressed appreciation for participating governments, especially the ministries of environment and health, and chairs of Thematic Working Groups. He also thanked Royal Thai government, CRI and WHO for hosting and jointly organizing the forum.
6. On behalf of the Government of Thailand, H.E. Dr. Vallop Thainuea, Deputy Minister of Public Health welcomed the participants to the forum hosted in Thailand and informed the forum of the auspicious occasion of the 80th birthday anniversary of His Majesty King Bhumidol of Thailand and His Majesty's lifelong efforts on sustainable development. In recognition of responsibility of environment and health sectors and necessity to formulate harmonized policies, he called for close

coordination and partnership in environment and health as the forum took a meaningful first step. He expressed his sincere appreciation for Professor Dr. HRH Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol and resource persons of the scientific segments, and UNEP and WHO for convening the First Ministerial Regional Forum.

7. In the inauguration of the Ministerial Regional Forum on Environment and Health, Professor Dr. HRH Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol welcomed the ministers and participants and emphasized the urgency of environment and health issues on regional and global level. Recognizing a large population suffering from adverse effects of environment and health issues, Professor Dr. HRH Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol called for individual and collective efforts to address the challenges.
8. The opening session was followed by a Scientific Segment on “Emerging Environmental Health Concerns – Strengthening Science in Policies” chaired by Professor Dr. HRH Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol and facilitated by Professor Nay Htun. The chairman’s summary of the Scientific Segment is enclosed in Annex 4, and the keynote lectures by Professor Dr. HRH Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol, Professor Sir Gordon Conway and Professor Margaret Liu are provided in Annexes 5, 6 and 7, respectively.

III. INTRODUCTION TO THE MEETING AND OVERVIEW OF THE DRAFT CHARTER OF THE REGIONAL FORUM AND THE COMPOSITION OF THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS (Agenda Item 2)

9. Highlighting the importance of linkage between environment and health, Dr. Abdul Sattar Yoosuf, WHO and Mr. Mylvakanam Iyngararasan, UNEP briefed the forum on previous High-Level Officials Meetings in 2004 and 2006 and made a presentation on introduction to the First Ministerial Regional Forum and the composition of Thematic Working Groups endorsed by the High-Level Officials’ Meeting. The draft final Charter of the Regional Forum was presented in detail as a framework for cooperation including regional priorities for 2007-2010, institutional structure, and six Thematic Working Groups. The presentation is attached in Annex 8.
10. The meeting discussed and formally adopted the Charter, as given in Annex 9.

IV. REPORT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIAL MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

11. Dr. Supat Wangwongwatana, Director-General, Pollution Control Department, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand and the Chairperson of the High-Level Officials’ Meeting, reported on the outcomes of the High-Level Officials’ Meeting, especially the development of the Charter, development and implementation of the National Environmental Health Action Plans (NEHAPs), work plans of the Thematic Working Groups and the discussion on "Bangkok Declaration on Environment and Health".
12. The meeting noted the outcomes of the High-Level Officials’ Meeting and approved the compositions and work plans of the Thematic Working Groups (TWGs) as submitted by the High-Level Officials’ Meeting.
13. The meeting discussed and approved for Chairs of the TWGs as follows:
 - 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

V. STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTERS OF ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH (Agenda Item 4)

14. Ministers of Environment and Health from fourteen participating countries made statements during this session.
15. H.E. Pehin Dato Haji Hazair Abdullah, Deputy Minister of Health, Brunei Darussalam shared Brunei's experience with environmental disasters impacting human health. In recognition of vulnerability of population to adverse environmental effects, the Department of Environment is seeking cross-sector cooperation in various issues. As a party to seven international environmental treaties, the country integrated strategies on environment and health at national level. The commitment of the Brunei Darussalam government on this issue will be continued in support of the Bangkok Declaration and the Charter.
16. H.E. Dr. Mok Mareth, Senior Minister of Environment, Cambodia mentioned the continued engagement and support of Cambodia since the 2004 meeting on environment and health. Recognizing the importance of technical and financial assistance, the Minister urged international organizations and other participating countries to support efforts on environment and health in the region.
17. H.E. Dr. Nuth Sokhom, Minister of Health, Cambodia introduced the national progress, following the Regional Initiative. A draft Cambodian Action Plan for Health has been supported by WHO and relevant ministries of Cambodia. Stating that a majority of deaths in Cambodia is largely due to infectious diseases associated with environmental factors, he recognized the significance of the forum as initiating a regional movement on environment and health, and expressed his commitment to continued support for policy development and information sharing on environment and health.
18. H.E. Dr. Chen Xiaohong, Vice Minister of Health, People's Republic of China said he was delighted to attend this forum and reiterated that environment and health has important implications for human development. Rapid global economic development has caused environmental deterioration, and unbalanced and unsustainable economic development has brought double burdens for developing countries. In strengthening efforts on environment and health, the Chinese government recognized the importance of these issues and launched a large-scale campaign on environment and health. Harmonizing environment and health with development, China has been addressing the issues of environment and health through the establishment of special agencies and regulations, and active communication. Highlighting the role of coordination activities on environment and health of the region, he expressed China's support for the adoption of the Charter, promoting joint efforts of the region.
19. Ms. Sri Hudyastuti, Assistant Minister of Environment, Indonesia, delivered a statement on behalf of the Minister of Environment of Indonesia. The statement touched upon environmental impacts on human health, raising concerns on climate change which was likely to increase diseases. She mentioned the national policy of Indonesia on health related to environment through the national action programme to address challenges to environment and health. She called for continued efforts to enhance awareness of community, promote scientific research, and strengthen capacity with an integrated approach.
20. On behalf of the Minister of Health, Dr. Indriono Tantoro, Ministry of Health, Indonesia presented a statement. He mentioned the importance of development of environment and health infrastructure based on the experience of Indonesia as a developing country while presenting detailed statistics in relation to the issues. With increasing concerns on infectious diseases in Indonesia, the government has been developing long-term and mid-term policies in line with the National Environmental Health Action Plan.

21. H.E. Mr. Tomokatsu Kitagawa, Vice Minister of Environment, Japan pointed out that Asia has become a significant economic driving force, but such economic development brought adverse effects in environment and health. He ensured Japan's commitment for active cooperation to act on environment and health, and presented Japan's national efforts on the issues of concern. Japan has developed a future environmental policy guideline in June 2006 and will aim to share information on Japan's experience. With the G8 summit to be held in Japan in 2008, Japan is in pursuit of continued efforts in collaboration with other countries.
22. H.E. Mr. Lee, Chi-beom, Minister of Environment, Republic of Korea expressed Korea's support for regional cooperation and information exchange. He welcomed the adoption of the Charter and the Bangkok Declaration on Environment and Health, and recommended that priority consideration be given to socially vulnerable people. He reiterated the country's commitment to sharing experience with other countries and its support in holding scientific conferences on key environment and health issues if needed. He also sought the endorsement of Korea's proposal to host the next Ministerial Regional Forum in his statement.
23. The statement of the Minister of Health and Welfare, Republic of Korea was delivered on his behalf. As a basis for joint commitment, he mentioned that Republic of Korea fully endorsed the Declaration and understood environment and health concerns expressed in the Charter. In the statement, the Ministry of Health and Welfare confirmed its commitment to work in global efforts on environment and health in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment. With an increase in the environment and health concerns in the country, the Ministry has developed a new Health Plan 2010, and conducted a national health and nutrition survey. The statement pledged continuous efforts to address emerging environment and health issues.
24. H.E. Dr. Ponmek Dalaloy, Minister of Health, Lao PDR expressed his appreciation for organizers and hosts, and described his country where much of its population was still living in rural areas and economy still needed to be developed further. He pointed out numerous environment and health challenges, such as declining water and air quality affecting the health of population, use of pesticides and chemical pollutants in rural areas without systematic monitoring, and increasing generation of solid waste in urban areas. He mentioned that relevant policies were in development to ensure the quality of life of Lao community, and elaborated on achievements and challenges in strengthening environment and health sectors. Reaffirming the support of Lao PDR for the Bangkok Declaration, he encouraged the Thematic Working Groups to include pilot projects and cost-benefit analysis.
25. H.E. Dato Lee Kah Choon, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Health, Malaysia mentioned the changing patterns of diseases, and acknowledged complex linkages between health and environmental issues. He stressed that it was important to pay attention simultaneously to economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity including health in order to maintain sustainable development. In recognition of the role of environmental health indicators as a key element for strategic management, he presented Malaysia's efforts in this regard by their environment and health research institutes. He shared the experience of Malaysia on several diseases including dengue fever and reiterated Malaysia's support and commitment for the Regional Forum.
26. H.E. Mr. Ichinkhorloo Erdenebaatar, Minister for Nature and Environment, Mongolia emphasized that environment and health problems do not belong to one particular country and become one of the critical problems of the world. He stated that concerns on environment and health in Mongolia have been increasing in recent years and the government has sought technical support from international partners and neighboring countries. He elaborated on national efforts and achievements to address the issues and urged for collective efforts of different stakeholders.
27. H.E. Professor Kyaw Myint, Minister of Health, Myanmar referred to raising concerns on challenges of the new century including population growth, spread of epidemics, land degradation

and climate change. He mentioned a high priority being put on health impacts related to environmental issues, and described national efforts by Myanmar government on air and water qualities, solid and hazardous waste, biodiversity conservation, ozone depletion, and natural disasters. Recognizing concerns on environment and health issues, he welcomed the adoption of the Charter, looking forward to its effective implementation.

28. H.E. Dr. Francisco T Duque III, Secretary of Health, the Philippines elaborated on environment and health issues in urban and rural area, and mentioned that like other developing countries, the Philippines required to strengthen its capacity to deal with these issues of environment and health. Having sustainable sanitation as one of the priorities of the government, he shared details of harmonized and synergetic policy development of the government, including the National Environmental Health Action Plan.
29. Mr. Khoo Seow Poh, National Environment Agency, Singapore introduced Singapore's continuous efforts on environment and health in a balanced and holistic manner. He covered diverse environmental issues in view of human health impact, including air and water quality, hazardous solid waste, and climate change. In particular, he mentioned that water is scarce resource of a small country like Singapore. As given circumstances require more sustainable solutions, Singapore has been developing policies and management systems to address the issues. He expressed Singapore's support for the Charter and reaffirmed cooperation with UNEP, WHO and participating countries.
30. H.E. Dr. Vallop Thainuea, Deputy Minister of Public Health, Thailand reaffirmed the commitment of Thailand to carrying out national efforts in line with Agenda 21 and Rio Declaration. In recognition of the importance of environment and health management, he presented seven national goals for 2007 to 2010, including the development and implementation of a National Environmental Health Action Plan, and introduced activities of the Chulabhorn Research Institute (CRI) in education, research, and training as a regional centre of excellence. While presenting various efforts by Thailand in addressing environment and health issues, he stated that the Thai government was in full support of the Charter and its implementation.
31. Dr. Nguyen Khac Kinh, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Viet Nam shared the view of Viet Nam as a developing country. With rapid industrialization and modernization in recent years, Viet Nam has been experiencing adverse impacts on environment and health. He presented previous and present efforts of the government in pursuit of protecting the environment and health through policy development and researches.
32. Dr. Nguyen Huy Nga, Ministry of Health, Viet Nam delivered a statement on behalf of the Minister of Health, and introduced national efforts and achievements of the government to address issues of environment and health. He mentioned the experience of Viet Nam as the country has suffered from serious long-term impacts of war on environment and health, and referred to other challenges of the country such as water, sanitation, air pollution and urbanization. He affirmed Viet Nam's support for the ministerial forum and continuous partnership on environment and health through capacity building and information sharing in particular.

VI. ADOPTION OF THE BANGKOK DECLARATION OF THE REGIONAL FORUM (Agenda Item 5)

33. H.E. Dr. Vallop Thainuea, Deputy Minister of Public Health, Thailand, the chairperson of the forum facilitated the discussion to prepare a summary of the ministerial forum in the form of a Declaration, Bangkok Declaration. The forum reviewed the draft Bangkok Declaration on Environment and Health. Following discussions on further amendments, the forum adopted the Bangkok Declaration on Environment and Health, as given in Annex 10.

VII. CONCLUSION AND CLOSING OF THE FORUM (Agenda Item 6)

34. In the closing of the Ministerial Regional Forum on Environment and Health, Dr. Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Deputy Regional Director of WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia congratulated the participants for a successful forum and emphasized that cooperation and collaboration were the way forward for the future. She mentioned that National Environmental Health Action Plans developed over the years and the Bangkok Declaration endorsed at the forum would provide a backbone and opportunities as a common ground for future efforts along with the work plans of six Thematic Working Groups. Reaffirming continuous support and commitment of WHO in partnership for environment and health, she expressed her appreciation to the government of Thailand and the Chulabhorn Research Institute and looked forward to the next meeting to be held in the Republic of Korea.
35. Mr. Surendra Shrestha, Regional Director of UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific joined WHO in congratulating the forum on the adoption of the Charter and the Bangkok Declaration on Environment and Health in his closing remarks. Looking back on previous proceedings of the forum, he highlighted four major points from statements by ministers of environment and health during the meeting: necessity of environment and health for human development and happiness; increase of environment and health issues associated with economic prosperity; needs for better policy package especially for implementation; and emerging issues such as climate change and dust and sandstorms which require better national capacity. He also pointed out three enabling pillars discussed at the forum: capacity building, partnerships, and regional cooperation. He thanked fourteen participating governments, local hosts and the Chularbhorn Research Institute for a successful forum.
36. Following the closing remarks of WHO and UNEP, H.E. Dr. Vallop Thainuea, Deputy Minister of Public Health, Thailand, addressed the forum on behalf of the Thai government. Acknowledging strong concerns and commitment for national and regional cooperation expressed throughout the forum, he stated that the discussions in the forum would facilitate and strengthen partnerships in environment and health further. Highlighting the success of the forum as an important initial step towards regional and national cooperation, he urged for continued support of the participating governments. He expressed profound gratitude for Professor Dr. HRH Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol and resource persons of the scientific segment, and thanked participants for valuable contributions to the forum.
37. The First Ministerial Regional Forum was officially closed by the Chairperson.