

**Joint statement on delivered by India on behalf of the Group of countries representing South-East Asia region(SEARO)**

Chair,

It gives me great pleasure to deliver this joint statement on behalf of the Group of countries representing South-East Asia region. I convey my appreciation of member States for their active and constructive engagement in preparation for this historic Special Session of the World Health Assembly.

2. While welcoming the report of the Working Group on Strengthening WHO Preparedness and Response to Health Emergencies, I also place on record our appreciation for its Bureau, that, despite the time constraints and challenges of a virtual engagement, led an efficient inter-governmental discussion, resulting in a substantive outcome. Special thanks also go to the two co-chairs, who led us towards a consensus-based Decision for this Special Session of the World health Assembly.

3. Southeast Asia supports the decision to draft and negotiate a WHO convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, with a view to adoption under Article 19, or under other provisions of the WHO Constitution as may be deemed appropriate by the INB.

Chair,

4. Southeast Asia reiterates that equity is of critical importance for global health. The biggest lesson that we all have learnt from the pandemic is that the glaring inequity needs to be addressed as a top priority. As mandated by the 74<sup>th</sup> WHA, the WGPR has very clearly pointed out the severe inadequacy of the IHR (2005) and has, *inter-alia*, highlighted the benefits of and the need to develop a new legally binding international instrument to address the gaps exposed by COVID-19. We must keep equity at the core of our deliberations at the INB, when we discuss the substantive elements, as well as when we draft and negotiate the zero draft of a new international instrument in prevention, preparedness and response to health emergencies. Such an instrument, with a view to adoption under Article 19, or under other provisions of the WHO Constitution as may be deemed appropriate by the INB should, *inter-alia*, address the following:

- i. It should help to address barriers to development and distribution of medical countermeasures, as well as related issues such as research and development, intellectual property, technology transfer and scaling up local and regional manufacturing capacity during emergencies.
  - ii. It should contribute to strengthening the international legal framework for pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response, while recognizing the different levels of development and capacities across WHO member states.
5. We strongly believe that the public health infrastructure in developing countries needs to be strengthened significantly. Governments and development partners' effort should therefore focus on building and strengthening national and sub-national capacities on preparedness and response.
6. We strongly feel that priority should also be given to establishment of strong regional capacities on research and development of essential medical products and innovations, for manufacturing, regulation and procurement of tools for equitable and effective access to essential medical products and innovations, and for clinical trials.

Chair,

7. Lastly, we would like to reiterate our region's strong commitment, to take the process forward in building back better, including through developing of an international instrument, with a view to adoption under Article 19, or under other provisions of the WHO Constitution as may be deemed appropriate by the INB, as the world is expecting us to take all the essential steps to prevent a future pandemic, keeping in mind the principles of solidarity, inclusiveness, transparency, efficiency and consensus, leaving no one behind!

Thank you, Chair