

**Statement by the Hon. (Dr.) Rajitha Senaratne, Minister of Health Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine under the agenda item 2: Dialogue with DG**

Distinguished Chair, Colleague EB Members, Non-EB Delegations, Director General, Regional Directors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning to all, and let me take this opportunity to wish you a very happy New Year!

First of all thank you very much Director General for selecting Sri Lanka to celebrate the World Health Day. We will do our best to make this a significant event and share our experiences with the rest of the Member States. I look forward to welcoming Dr. Tedros and high-level officials of the WHO including the Regional Director, SEAR to this event.

Let me also thank the Director General and appreciate his initiative to put countries at the centre of WHO's work - to achieve results driven goals.

Dr. Tedros, under your committed leadership, we look forward to a Transformation of the WHO in the coming years, to play a catalytic role in improving people's health, with greater responsiveness.

For countries like my own, WHO engagement needs to evolve into a more catalytic and upstream response; thus, it is critical to have HR of high caliber and competence at the country level. Also the resource envelope should not be primarily dictated by the burden of disease alone, but rather by the catalytic role that WHO can play as the global leader in health.

My country is considered by most experts as a low cost, high impact model of health care in South East Asia and the world. It has eliminated of Malaria, filariasis and neonatal tetanus as public health problems. Good achievements in maternal and child health care, high life expectancy, and near universal child immunization coverage.

But countries like ours now face major Challenges: fast aging populations, very high burden from NCDs; minimal and often inadequate elderly care packages and services

and inequitable access to services for the disabled and vulnerable populations. These services need to be strengthened.

#### On Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

1. We urge the DG to sustain strong political advocacy at global level for UHC. You may want to consider putting together a binding international convention on improving coverage, access, financial protection and quality of care in support of UHC.
2. In our Region the Regional Director has prioritized Human Resources and Access to Medicines as two Flagship Programmes and these are extremely crucial for UHC and these fit very well with the content of the EB paper. Also SEAR has a lot of experience to share on these issues and it will be very useful for the DG to draw from them.
3. At the Regional level we should consider developing a platform for (SEAR) countries for joint learning and sharing of experiences and success stories.

#### Regarding Emergencies:

I also would like to appreciate WHO's contribution and role in enhancing preparedness and strengthening response to emergencies. For example the immediate response of the WHO South East Asia Region through the South East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund when an emergency occurs to provide life-saving medical assistance. This is a model that could be considered by all Regions.

Also important is the need to shift from a disaster response framework to a disaster risk reduction framework. As an example, In 2015 Sri Lanka revised the strategic plan for health sector disaster and emergency preparedness in line with the 2015 Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction.

I suggest that the DG and WHO continue supporting Member States in strengthening their ability to implement IHR and to develop country strategies for public health preparedness and response, with support from WHO.

With the billion target under emergencies, adequate resources need to be mobilized to achieve the target and strengthen the WHE Programme.

I will end this intervention by stressing that for speedy response, we need to continue to make sure that the bulk of both human and financial resources flow to the countries and not stay concentrated at the higher levels.

I thank you.