

Statement by Ms Shalina Miah, Regional Manager – Asia and the Pacific, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) Programme

(500 words)

As the World Health Organization (WHO) marks its 73rd Session Regional Committee for South-East Asia, it brings me great pride to reflect on the brave actions of volunteers that offer their time, knowledge and often risk their lives in supporting COVID-19 response efforts in the South-East Asia Region to contribute to WHO's mission to 'promote health, keep people safe, serve the vulnerable'.

Today, actions around the world are a testimony to how volunteers are committed to ensuring the well-being of people and their communities. Coronavirus pandemic showed us that there is no limit to the commitment of volunteers around the world to rise above challenges to extend their helping hand to support others during time of crisis - in inspiring ways – both onsite and online.

For example, in **Thailand** more than 1,040,000 Village Health Volunteers with the Department of Health Service stepped forward in providing support across the country and an additional 15,000 public health volunteers in Bangkok were conducting home visits, creating health awareness, delivering medicine, and providing reports to public health authorities.

The COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan by the WHO identifies community volunteers as key stakeholders for risk communication and community engagement. As such, community volunteers were mobilized in 75,000 villages across **Indonesia** to assist the government in increasing public awareness programmes of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When movement of people is restricted, volunteers find creative ways to step forward and contribute in the online space through launching of online platforms like the one in **India** with a database of 12.4 million health professionals and 2.8 million youth volunteers of national volunteer schemes to help local governments in the preparation of crisis management plans in response and recovery efforts from the pandemic.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme also supported the UN's immediate response to COVID-19 by mobilizing skilled and qualified UN Volunteers on site and online volunteers, to support preparedness, response and longer-term recovery efforts.

These remarkable efforts merit being highlighted in this statement.

Using this opportunity, I would like to stress that complementary partnerships between governments, United Nations agencies, volunteers and volunteer-involving organizations are crucial going forward for building back better especially for the most vulnerable and in local communities. This is why it is important that volunteers are integrated in the health related and other development plans at the national level as indispensable resilient mechanism. It is also crucial that volunteers are involved and have a voice from the beginning and throughout all the stages of preparedness, response and recovery.

On behalf of the UN Volunteers Programme, I would like to thank WHO and all the member countries for their continuous partnership with volunteers and the UNV. We look forward to strengthening our partnership in engaging more citizens as volunteers to support the the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals across the Region.

I wish you all the best for your 73rd Session of WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia!