

Agenda 5: Regional Director's Annual Report on the Work of WHO in the South-East Asia Region covering the period 1 January to 31 December 2020

Chairperson, Hon. Ministers, Director General, Regional Director, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Sri Lanka would like to congratulate Dr. Poonam Singh, the Regional Director, for the excellent and comprehensive report on our collective work in improving health and well-being in the region.

My sincere thanks go to the Regional Director for the strong support of the WHO extended to my country at all times, and especially during this challenging time. Many of our public health achievements in the past years have been achieved in partnership and with the strong technical guidance of the WHO.

In 2020, our health system has been put to the test by the COVID-19 pandemic and impacted severely on the economy. Despite this, Sri Lanka has made important strides. Our response was swift, coordinated and guided by the Sri Lanka Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan. At the same time, we were able to sustain the delivery of essential health services through innovative approaches – medicine delivery through postal services, outdoor mobile clinics in lockdown areas, reorientation of family planning services, mental health drugs delivery and services at the community level, among others.

Sri Lanka with the support of WHO has leveraged the power of digital technology to train and mentor health staff through virtual platforms such as the NCD Learning Hub and learning management system linking more than 40 training institutions and to conduct meetings with peripheral health authorities. In addition, an innovative platform for real-time monitoring of Covid-19 using a mobile App was developed for health staff and the public.

To ensure access to quality and affordable medicines, the regulatory capacity of National Medicine Regulatory Authority is further enhanced through the implementation of an

institutional development plan and benchmarking as well as development of National Medicines Policy 2020-2025.

Similar to the trend in the region, we are experiencing this year, the highest reported number of cases and deaths so far, with the spread of the delta variant. We are doing our best to contain it through a combination of proven public health and social measures and accelerated Covid-19 vaccination, especially for the priority and vulnerable population – As of today, we have vaccinated 85.87% of the population over 20 years old with one dose and 61.94% with both doses.

For Sri Lanka, saving lives and protecting our population is our highest priority. We highly appreciate your tireless efforts for fair and equitable access to vaccines through the COVAX facility; and for the life-saving medical equipment and supplies. We highly value the strong and continuous support from WHO Country office, South East Asia Regional Office and WHO Headquarters, in responding to the demands of the pandemic and in 'building back better' the Sri Lankan health system towards achieving the goal of universal health coverage.