

Welcome Address at the Session on Calcutta Declaration

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Honorable Chief Minister of West Bengal, Professor Ramalingaswami, Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of all the participants to this Conference and on behalf of WHO, it is my great privilege to welcome the Hon'ble Chief Minister to our Conference on Public Health in South-East Asia. I appreciate your kind acceptance of our invitation to preside over this Special Session to adopt the Calcutta Declaration. The presence of a statesman of your stature today is a source of great inspiration to all of us and it augurs well for the success of our future efforts.

The objective of the Conference is to advocate the importance of public health for national development – both socio-economic and political. It also aims at promoting newer strategies for developing sound public health systems in the new millennium. We have here today some of the best thinkers and leading practitioners of public health from around the world as well as key policy makers from the countries of our Region.

We have so far had very stimulating and interesting discussions and we have made a number of important recommendations. We hope these will help to make the difference to ensure fully responsive public health systems in our countries.

We believe it is very appropriate that we chose this great city of Calcutta as the venue for this conference. Public Health in modern India started here. The All India Institute of Hygiene

and Public Health is the foremost institution dedicated to public health education in this country. We hope it will play an even bigger regional role in this regard in the future.

The Calcutta Declaration that we are adopting in this session, we believe embodies the spirit and sense of our deliberations. You will appreciate, Sir, that we consider health as a basic human right – a right that can be used as an opportunity to strengthen all our development efforts. We have now moved from the original rather narrow view of public health to look at it more comprehensively. To empower the people and to mobilize local, state, national and international resources to ensure conditions for healthy living. The Conference has re-emphasized the need for governments and the people to promote public health as a discipline, to strengthen the public health practice and education in our region.

We know that you will appreciate these because you have been committed to similar concerns throughout your public life. WHO, under Director-General Dr. Gro Harlem Brundland, has renewed its commitment to continue global efforts to address the health concerns of the people of the world.

Once again, I thank you for your kind presence, your blessings and your support to achieve the objectives of this Conference.