

Remarks at the Meeting of Health Ministers,
Regional Committee for South-East Asia, sixtieth session
Thimpu, Bhutan, 31 August 2007

Your Excellency Mr Dorji, Honourable Prime Minister of
Bhutan, Regional Director Dr Plianbangchang, honourable
ministers of health, ladies and gentlemen,

I am most pleased to be present at this meeting of the
health ministers of South-East Asia.

Despite the diversity of the countries you represent, you
face several shared challenges.

Many of these arise from the size of your populations and
the sheer numbers of people you must reach.

You also have, especially at the policy level, some shared
assets.

I am referring, in particular, to your

I am referring, in particular, to your commitment to poverty reduction, and your determination to reach universal coverage with essential interventions.

In this part of the world, an objective such as “scaling up” takes on a much bigger meaning.

Your commitment shows great political courage in the face of a challenge magnified many times in this most populous region in the world.

I also want to thank the government of Bhutan, and its Prime Minister, for hosting this event.

In terms of national policies, I know that Bhutan is considered the Region’s “crown jewel” in terms of its equitable and rational policy of access to essential medicines.

I also want to commend Bhutan’s commitment to Gross National Happiness as the best measure of true progress in development.

I doubt that there could be any

I doubt that there could be any other objective that so closely aligns with the comprehensive definition of health set out in the WHO constitution.

I know that I, personally, have much to learn from your collective experiences.

I will listen closely to your discussions, and thank you for this opportunity.