

Agenda item 2: Environmental and development in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease pandemic in the Asia-Pacific region

(Intervention from WHO SEARO)

Thank you chair!

Excellencies, Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

I thank the secretariat for the background paper on environmental and development in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic in the Asia-Pacific region, outlining the initiatives and actions for consideration by the committee. Allow me to also congratulate madam chair and vice chairs for your election as office bearers of the session and look forward to fruitful outcomes from the session.

COVID-19 pandemic is the greatest global shock in decades. Hundreds of thousands of lives have been lost, and the world's economy likely faces the worst recession since the 1930s. The resulting loss of employment and income will cause further damage to livelihoods, health, and sustainable development. The pandemic has served as a wake-up call, underscoring the importance of strengthening and accelerating environmental action. The concept of planetary health is more of essential in the response to that call, guiding COVID-19 recovery efforts at the regional level. Planetary health can also guide whole-of-government approaches to COVID-19 recovery efforts at all levels and to specific sectoral policies.

Recognizing the vulnerability of the south east Asia region to climate change and related extreme weather events the Ministers of Health have signed the Male' Declaration on building health systems resilience to climate change at the 70th Regional Committee meeting held in September 2017. Assessing vulnerability of healthcare facilities to climate risks and developing plans and procedures to improve the resilience of the facilities and system is one of the key actions of the Male' Declaration.

WHO has implemented multiple support programmes to Member States which includes assessing climate change and health vulnerability and developing adaption options; development of health components of National Adaptation Plans; implementation of projects in countries across all WHO Regions aiming to strengthen the resilience of their health systems; and integration of climate/weather variables into surveillance systems of climate-sensitive diseases and health outcomes.

Madam Chair, participants, ladies and gentlemen,

Societies need to protect themselves, and to recover, as quickly as possible. Strategies for the longer-term recovery in the wake of COVID-19 to promote a greener, more equal and resilient future aligned with the principles of planetary health and sustainable development is essential. To achieve the highest attainable standard of health, well-being and equity worldwide, recovery strategies should give attention on humanity's political, economic and social systems and the safe environmental limits within which it can flourish.

Governments need to create strong national frameworks to embed biodiversity and ecosystem services into the disease prevention, poverty eradication and sustainable development agendas. Regional platforms and networks that support raising climate ambition in Asia and the Pacific and tackling of air pollution as shared risks and responsibilities should be further strengthened. Regional capacity building and dialogue on best practices and development of knowledge products and best buys must always be promoted.

In view of those challenges and opportunities presented, WHO reiterates and support the actions forwarded by the committee, as these are in line with central policy prescriptions in WHO's "Manifesto for a Healthy and Green Recovery" from COVID-19 and call upon member states to implement the manifesto for a healthy and green recovery from COVID-19 while also focusing on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. We wish for successful deliberations and outcomes.

Thank you!