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**IPA Statement at the 74th WHO Regional Committee of South-East Asia on Agenda 9.1: Measles and rubella elimination by 2023**

Childhood vaccination has always been one of the core priorities of the International Pediatric Association. Building the foundation of child health for decades, vaccinations protect children from preventable illnesses including measles and rubella. IPA applauds WHO’s commitments particularly member states of the Southeast Asia region who have adopted the goal of “measles and rubella elimination by 2023” and endorsed the strategic plan for the period of 2020-2024.

With the ongoing battle against COVID-19, global childhood vaccination through routine immunization services have declined in a majority of countries as part of the many essential service disruptions occurring due to the pandemic. Amongst the 23 million children worldwide who missed out on their basic vaccines, over 3 million missed their first measles vaccines. Although this disruption transcended regions globally in 2020, Southeast Asia remains as one of the most affected regions. In 2021, the incidence of measles and rubella in the region were reported staggering high in a number of countries in the region. Protection against COVID-19 should not be our only immunization priority. WHO and member states are urged to drive catch-up immunization in their respective countries to protect children from preventable illnesses, including measles and rubella.

Despite the introduction of the measles and rubella vaccine in the 1960s, global mortality attributed to the disease remains high, occurring mostly among children under 5 years of age. Preventable complications and lifelong disabilities remain a global threat if measles and rubella are not eliminated. Health systems throughout the region must be strengthened to increase vaccination coverage. Member states are urged to firmly embed measles and rubella programs as a national priority, rectifying gaps in immunization coverage, and tailor existing measles and rubella immunity gaps to local challenges, conditions and available resources.

Amidst a digitalized world with information at the tips of our fingers, the spread of myths and misinformation rattles communities, with vaccine hesitancy being a threat to global health more than ever. With a goal to reduce vaccine hesitancy in communities, disseminate the value of vaccination, increase demand for immunization, and to help reach the targets of the Global Vaccine Action Plan, IPA has initiated the IPA Vaccine Trust Course. Since December 2020, over 4,000 healthcare workers across 127 countries have engaged with our course.

To reach our global goal of measles and rubella elimination by 2023, commitment and widespread effort from a broad range of stakeholders, including local communities, families and governments is essential. As a proud partner of WHO and UNICEF and a leading voice for child health globally, IPA has always been ready and well-equipped to be a partner to member states and agents of change across the globe to protect every child, every age, everywhere from preventable deaths because one preventable death is one death too many.