Honourable Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates,

The International Federation of Medical Students’ Associations (IFMSA) and the International Pharmaceutical Students’ Federation (IPSF) applaud the momentous work that the WHO is maintaining in support of the South-East Asia Region through the Regional Vaccine Implementation Program 2016-2020 as the guiding strategic framework.

We appreciate the decision-makers, health workforce and volunteers driving the vaccination programs and we believe that the South-East Asia Region has the potential to control and eliminate vaccine-preventable diseases and leave no one behind in the path to universal immunization.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has not only strained our health systems and the performance of the essential immunization services, it has also revealed the barriers and inequities faced in the COVID-19 vaccine introduction and delivery. Moreover, the vaccine-preventable diseases surveillance has been heavily affected and has further exposed our Region to the existing challenges of suboptimal immunisation systems and coverage, and lack of integration of immunization and other primary health care services.

This pandemic serves as a reminder that no one is safe until everyone is safe and that universal immunisation is a path to advance our society to a safer and healthier future. Renewed political will and commitment in the Immunisation Agenda will pave the way for more sustainable transformation of existing and new vaccination platforms.

Moving forward, our response and plans for vaccinations must embody even greater tenacity – one that is bold in vision, inclusive in implementation, and equitable in outcomes. Non-governmental organisations and youth are key to a partnership-based and people-centered approach. We are crucial in the design and implementation of successful and context-specific vaccination programmes. Youth are well-positioned to contribute to contemporary public health
challenges, such as implementing mass health education strategies on vaccination to improve population adherence to the vaccination plan and to address vaccine hesitancy. IFMSA and IPSF call on the WHO, other multilateral organisations and Member States to hold NGOs and youth as equal partners in both policy and practice in their plans to combat vaccine-preventable diseases.

We further urge the member states to equitable access and improve population adherence to the COVID-19 vaccines and expand their coverage towards vulnerable population groups. For us to build back healthier and better, we call on the WHO and Member states of the South-East Asia Region to ensure immunisation programs are tailored to the needs of communities, keeping people at the centre of the process. We also emphasise the necessity of building trust in communities by enhancing professional competence and reliability for the effective functioning of vaccinations and acceptance of public policy.

Thank you for your attention.

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