8.4 Beginning of the Decade of Action for Ending Viral Hepatitis, HIV and STIs as Public Health Threats by 2030 in the South-East Asia Region
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Honourable Chair, Distinguished guests,

It is a great honour to speak on behalf of the International Pharmaceutical Students’ Federation (IPSF) which represents the voice of over 500,000 pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences students, and recent graduates from over 90 countries worldwide.

IPSF commends the WHO and its member states for making significant achievements in the bid to end viral hepatitis, HIV and STIs as public health threats thus far. While the medical sciences have advanced in understanding, diagnosing, treating and preventing these diseases, societal challenges such as stigma, discrimination, and universal access to health and healthcare services remains a challenge on the road to elimination.

Stigma and the spread of misconceptions remain rampant in South-East Asia which results in discrimination against individuals and communities impacted with HIV, hepatitis and STIs. A lack of public education and priority towards preventive measures are barriers that need to be torn down in efforts to end these diseases as public health threats.

IPSF would like to urge the WHO and its member states to continue its educational efforts - keeping abreast with the evolving scientific knowledge while grounding public health communication in the context of local communities. Priority should be given to educating the public and ending the stigma on people impacted with hepatitis, HIV and STIs. Education remains a crucial tool to combat the further spread of these diseases, therefore, policies and guidelines should also be drawn to support the dissemination of proper information to the public. IPSF would also like to urge all stakeholders to work hand-in-hand with NGOs and local advocacy groups to increase their reach, especially to marginalised and vulnerable communities. Collective efforts are key towards the elimination of these diseases as public health threats. This will give impacted individuals improved access to the proper healthcare services they deserve.

The IPSF Asia Pacific Regional Office (IPSF APRO) ran various campaigns debunking myths about these diseases, discussing equitable access to necessary healthcare services, and designing public health programmes for localised communities for our members in the Asia Pacific region. IPSF APRO recently released multilingual booklets on hepatitis and conducted a two-part campaign (educational and advocacy) on HIV/AIDS on our social media. IPSF APRO has also executed an innovative Public Health Programme Design Competition for local communities in combating HIV/AIDS. Our efforts collectively strengthen the knowledge and understanding, give an appreciation of the challenges in local communities, and finally provide a challenging, educational, and collaborative public health experience for our members.

IPSF aims to improve public health in our roles as future pharmacists. Pharmacists are key strategic front-liners who can contribute more to support immunisation, increase public education on the importance of regular health screening, and safe sexual practices. We urge the WHO and its member states to broaden and integrate pharmacists to have them play active roles in the course of action against these diseases as public health threats in the South-East Asia Region.

Thank you.