Statement to the 75th Regional Committee for South-East Asia
Provisional Agenda Item 8.2: Strengthening health emergency preparedness and response in the SE Asia Region building upon lessons learnt from COVID-19

Honourable Delegates,

Public Services International welcomes The Regional Strategic Roadmap for Health Security and Health System Resilience for Emergencies and the opportunity to make this statement.

The pandemic has laid bare the deep systemic cracks in the global health system. As the pandemic spread, we witnessed the ravaging effects of vaccine inequity on low, and middle-income countries while high-income countries hoarded vaccines and other medical products. The unequal access to vaccines was enabled by pharmaceutical monopolies, protected by unfair trade rules that allow them to refuse to share data and block manufacturing of accessible vaccines, treatments and technologies.

The need of the hour is therefore an overhaul of the current system. We need a global system where public health priorities, not profits, nor the priorities of the richest, direct health decisions during a global crisis. We need public-led and owned health systems engaged in international and regional collaboration, especially in the global south. We therefore welcome the committees focus on creating regional research and development hubs to ensure people’s access to vaccines and medical products as well as the emphasis on developing and maintaining resilient health systems.

We support the roadmap’s emphasis on increasing public spending on health systems. The pandemic demonstrated that private sector supply chains are unreliable in a crisis and, by definition, need to service the wealthiest first. We need to reform global healthcare supply chains for PPE, medicines, vaccines, diagnostics and all medical equipment and supplies required for preparedness and response, by refocusing on local and public-led production; developing regional supply chains, pooled procurement strategies and adopting industrial policies that enable local manufacturing for public health goods.

Consequently, we are concerned by the emphasis in the strategic plan on public-private partnerships across the system, including in strengthening PHC. The inclusion of the private sector in health systems has repeatedly been proven to undermine health outcomes and discriminate against the most marginalised in the community, including women, children, and Indigenous peoples. But the pandemic has shown that all suffer when parts of the population are denied adequate healthcare. We urge delegates to push for research, development, production, supply, and access to medical products as public goods, public-led and owned.

We also note with concern that while the roadmap acknowledges the role of health care workers in response to situations of emergencies, it does not adequately address the acute shortage of health workers or the often, dreadful conditions under which the workforce operate. Our affiliates report working under conditions of high stress and workload with low wages and job insecurity. Many, such as the large pool of community health workers in the PHC system, work without recognition as workers entitled to wages, job security or benefits, in national laws.

To build resilient health systems that can respond to a health crisis, it is imperative that the health workforce enjoys decent work conditions with secure employment. We urge member states to address the rights of the health workforce in the region as a key pillar in strengthening health systems.

Public Services International is a Global Union Federation of more than 700 trade unions representing 30 million workers in 154 countries. We bring their voices to the UN, ILO, WHO and other regional and global organisations. We defend trade union and workers’ rights and fight for universal access to quality public services.
Annex
REQUEST SHEET

THE SEVENTY–FIFTH SESSION OF WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Participants are requested to submit statements relevant to the agenda item(s) of concern.

**Declaration by IGO/NSA**

WHO Secretariat,

I wish to submit a statement for the Agenda Item: **8.2**

**Title**- Strengthening health emergency preparedness and response in the SE Asia Region building upon lessons learnt from COVID-19

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**NOTES:**

* Invited Representatives may submit one oral statement for the entire RC Session. Any additional statements will be considered “written statements”.

*Representatives are requested to submit statements relevant to the agenda item(s) of concern. Please complete an individual ‘Request Sheet’ for each statement. The ‘Request Sheet’ duly completed along with the statement is to be e-mailed at sepir@who.int, addressed to:

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