Statement of the
International Federation of Medical Students’ Associations (IFMSA)
75th Regional Committee for the WHO South East Asia Region

Provisional Agenda Item 8.2
Strengthening health emergency preparedness and response in the SE Asia Region building upon lessons learnt from COVID-19

Honourable Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,

The International Federation of Medical Students’ Associations acknowledges the immense effort and progress made by the WHO in directing the global health response to the ongoing pandemic. From this, we have learned that intersectoral interventions, multidisciplinary approaches, and meaningful engagement of key stakeholders, especially the youth, are fundamental in tackling future health emergencies. IFMSA thus calls on the Member States to engage the youth - including the new WHO Youth Council - in the process towards constructing new mechanisms for pandemic preparedness and response.

Obstacles such as hierarchical structures and tokenism are still prevalent in the South-East Asia region. To address this, capacity building modules should be developed to target the health workforce at the primary level so that students are empowered to take initiative in organizing student-led projects that aim to strengthen health emergency preparedness.

In terms of health communication, we see that social media has been a double-edged sword during the COVID-19 pandemic—a useful tool for communicating pertinent health information but also the breeding grounds for mis- and disinformation. Engaging youth who are digital natives in the effort to navigate the electronic platforms responsible for mass communication in the modern world will be crucial to improving public health literacy and curbing the spread of fake news. More proactive efforts toward infodemic management will prevent harmful self-medication practices and reduce vaccine hesitancy.

Collaborating amongst Non-state Actors, Member States, Non-governmental Organizations, and Universities to establish a comprehensive, inclusive, and joint strategy focused on minimizing the impact of Health emergencies needed to be set in place. We, the youth, are ready and ever-willing to contribute.

Thank you for your attention.

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