Honorable Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, I thank you for the opportunity to address you on behalf of Movendi International.

Movendi International congratulates WHO SEARO and Member States for the remarkable progress made in terms of improving maternal and child health. Our members in across the South-East Asia region remain concerned about persisting high rate of catastrophic health expenditure that people and communities are facing.

Since 2010, South-East Asia has seen a 29% increase in per capita alcohol consumption. Our countries and communities are being increasingly harmed by the products and practices of multinational alcohol companies. Already in 2006, researcher Prof. Robin Room warned: “When the poor become a consumer market, purchasing commercial brands of alcohol takes a larger toll on personal and family income than it does in other social classes. The poor are also more vulnerable to harms that come with increased alcohol use.”

In this warning, we see the link between the harmful products and practices of the alcohol industry, health and social harm due to alcohol in our countries, and the burden on health systems, as well as people and families.

But alcohol policy solutions, especially the three best buys and alcohol taxation in particular, hold significant potential to reduce the alcohol burden, to protect people, to promote health, and to yield substantial returns on investment that can be used to promote universal health coverage.

We call on the WHO South-East Asia Regional Office and Member States to mainstream alcohol prevention and control as high-reward solution for improving universal health coverage, primary health care, and for protecting people from poverty due to health spending.

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