

UNFPA Asia-Pacific Statement for 76th WHO SEARO Regional Committee - 30 October 2023

Distinguished Ministers,
Government Representatives,
WHO Regional Director Dr. Poonam Khetrapal Singh, and
all UN Colleagues,

On behalf of UNFPA, I would like to thank the World Health Organization Regional Office for South East Asia for inviting us to attend the Seventy-sixth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia. It is a pleasure to attend this pivotal gathering aimed at strengthening collaboration and progress on health in the South-East Asia region.

Access to quality health care without financial hardship is a stepping stone to realizing the human right to health. The United Nations General Assembly and the World Health Assembly resolutions adopted on universal health coverage (UHC) over the years have consistently reiterated how human rights – particularly the right to health – provide the overarching framework for UHC. The Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage, adopted by the United Nations' member states on 23 September 2019, declared UHC necessary for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. In the same year, at the Nairobi Summit, the international

community recommitted to ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as a part of UHC towards the achievement of United Nations SDG targets 3.7 and 3.8.

The world is off track to make significant progress towards UHC SDGs target 3.8 by 2030, as improvements to health services coverage have stagnated since 2015, and the proportion of the population that faces catastrophic levels of out-of-pocket health spending has also increased according to the recent 2023 Global monitoring report from WHO. According to the same report, South Asia is the region with the highest proportion of the population suffering catastrophic expenditures in the world.

Focusing on primary health care and improving sustainable domestic financing for health must be therefore crucial elements of our joint path towards advancing universal health coverage.

At UNFPA, we work together with partners in the South East Asia region to ensure that primary health care services are of high quality, accessible and affordable for all. In particular, UNFPA works to improve midwifery education and reinforce midwives' capacities to deliver the full range of sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health services - the majority of which can be effectively delivered at the primary health care level. UNFPA's focus on improving access to maternal health

services, including emergency obstetric and newborn care, as well as family planning services and counselling, together with the efforts to reinforce health sector capacities for Gender Based Violence response and promote evidence-based GBV prevention initiatives, will contribute to further advance the progress on UHC and the Sustainable Development Goal 3 on Health.

To conclude, I wish to congratulate WHO SEARO and all distinguished guests for the organisation of this 76th Session of the WHO Regional Committee, and UNFPA looks forward to continuing fruitful collaborations for the advancement of health and achievement of UHC in the South East Asia region.