

**FAO:** Mr Pablo Barrera

**Regarding:** Seventy-sixth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia, New Delhi

**Statement relating to agenda point 9.3 - COVID-19 and measures to “build back better” essential health services to achieve universal health coverage and the health-related SDGs [SEA/RC74/R1]**

*By Dr Michael Charles, CEO of the RBM Partnership to End Malaria*

Chairperson, Honorable Delegates, Regional Director - Thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement on behalf of the global malaria community.

The RBM Partnership to End Malaria commends the WHO for convening this meeting and discussing essential health services and how we can build back better to achieve Universal Health Coverage.

As we all know, the world has spent a number of years fighting COVID-19, the impact of which has fallen on healthcare and its services. Around Malaria, great strides were made in the fight to eliminate the disease, but that too is falling behind. We cannot allow this pandemic to rob us of the progress we have made.

There is an urgent need to address the hard-won gains that could be lost. If we lose control of malaria, our global health security will be weakened and the whole world will face the consequences.

In my experience as a medical doctor in the field I have seen first hand the importance of essential health care services. How families must choose between vital needs and human rights such as the right to food over the right to access medical care.

The adoption of the Political Declaration on Universal Health Coverage at the UN General Assembly is a landmark moment and a commitment to protecting these rights. We must now ensure this is adopted further throughout society to ensure families do not have to choose.

Following the pandemic, at a global level there has been a lack of funding for malaria and at the primary care level we see the catastrophic effect on human lives. We are seeing women - mothers and their children - disproportionately affected and needing to make difficult, life or death decisions.

The facts speak for themselves. According to the latest WHO World Malaria Report, there were 247 million cases of malaria globally in 2021 and the South-East Asia Region carries the estimated second highest burden globally.

The people we are talking to in local communities are telling us the same thing. We need to act now to avert a disaster. Malaria is an entry point. Investment will make countries stronger. We need to fund frontline services, community health workers, monitoring and modeling tools, as our defenses against future threats.

In the past Southeast Asia has made remarkable commitments to malaria elimination and at the RBM Partnership we urge you to continue to support us - ensuring all humans have access to quality health services. Together - as a partnership - we can prevent much of the devastation, if we act quickly.

With thanks to you Chairperson, but also to Ministers around the table for their consideration of Universal Health Coverage as a universal right.

**ENDS**