

**Statement by Professor Takahiro Nanri, President of Sasakawa Health Foundation
In Seventy-seventh Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia**

Greetings to all Member States and the Regional Director of the WHO South-East Asia Region. Thank you, RD SEARO, for your kind invitation to deliver this message to the Seventy-seventh Regional Committee.

I acknowledge the efforts of Member States to eliminate leprosy as a public health problem and to improve the quality of life of persons affected by leprosy. Also, I appreciate RD SEARO for leading the Global Leprosy Programme and facilitating implementation of the Global Leprosy Strategy 2021-2030 aiming at promoting interruption of transmission and elimination of the disease.

Over the past ten years, more than 100 000 new cases have been reported annually from the Region and in fact SEARO accounts for 72% of global new leprosy cases. Of cause for concern is that among new cases reported in the Region in 2023, 88 were child cases with visible disabilities.

In responding to this situation, timely and relevant technical guidance from WHO is necessary to steer leprosy control efforts globally. One example is the recommendation to use post-exposure prophylaxis as a preventive tool, which will make it possible to accelerate efforts to achieve a world without leprosy.

I am happy to announce that in 2025, Sasakawa Health Foundation and The Nippon Foundation will mark 50 years of our partnership with WHO in leprosy control, and that our funding of the WHO's Global Leprosy Programme will continue.

At the regional level, Sasakawa Health Foundation remains committed to supporting Member countries in SEARO and WHO SEARO in their efforts against leprosy. And we are prepared to strengthen our partnership with you to redouble efforts to eliminate the disease.

Thank you, and I wish you a successful Regional committee meeting.