

**Closing Statement by
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**ECOSOC ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW
REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
“PROMOTING HEALTH LITERACY”**

Beijing, 30 April 2009

Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to join the President of ECOSOC in thanking our gracious host, the Government of the People's Republic of China, for its generous hospitality and support in the organization of this meeting.

We are indeed grateful for the dedication and hard work of all those involved and the excellent team work shown by all sides.

In the midst of the global financial and economic crisis, there is a real risk that the topic of health literacy will be left on the backburner. We must ensure that does not happen. This message ought to be carried to the upcoming Review, in July.

During the past two days we have seen how improving health literacy can lead to substantial gains in public health and is critical for empowering individuals. Health literacy is thus a key to the achievement of the health-related development goals.

We have shared replicable practices in the Asia and Pacific region and found ways to overcome outstanding challenges. I will personally bring home at least three strong messages. A first clear message is that we need greater efforts towards the availability of indicators and benchmarks for measurement of health literacy and for monitoring of progress. Secondly, information and communication technologies must be harnessed and used wisely to ensure broad dissemination of health information and wide participation. Thirdly, it was also made evident that the health sector has to engage a much broader range of stakeholders within and outside the government at all levels to expand health literacy in an integrated manner.

Let me now focus on potentially one of the major outcomes of our meeting, which is the proposal to scale up effective health literacy interventions, including by giving consideration to the launch of a regional action plan to enhance health literacy in the Asia and Pacific Region. The levels of literacy clearly appear to be low in the region and stress the urgency for increased and sustained action.

Actions in this area could focus on (a) measuring health literacy and its overall impact on development; (b) strengthening multi-sectoral collaboration at all levels; (c) promoting better access and use of information and (d) building capacity for sustained action.

The Asia and Pacific Region is an ideal setting for developing such a plan, in view of the advances made in this area by some Member States.

By setting a road map for the region, the action plan could play a key role in improving public health through expanded health literacy. I call upon Member States and experts present today to further examine and discuss this proposal, including at the upcoming World Health Assembly to be held in Geneva at the end of May. Discussions could also continue at the Council's session in July and lead to some innovative steps, under the leadership of WHO.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to reiterate the significance of this regional meeting to ensuring that priority issues you have identified garner the attention they deserve at the Council's deliberations in Geneva. Through examination of the challenges of increasing health literacy in the Asia-Pacific region, in addition to hearing others' experiences and knowledge, I think we have a better understanding of how to overcome them. I am confident that our discussions have conveyed effective recommendations on how to deploy health literacy to accelerate progress towards achievement of the MDGs.

I trust that the dialogue we initiated on this topic over the past two days will carry on beyond this meeting. Indeed, this event should be seen as part of a continuum of efforts to achieve the agreed development goals. We should not rest until that objective has been fully realized.

I wish to thank once again all the panellists and all of the participants for a lively and informative two days meeting. We have come to the end of our event. The meeting is now adjourned.