



OPENING REMARKS
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WHO Regional Workshop on Operational Preparedness for Early
Response to Emerging Infectious Diseases
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Dr Kasai, representative of World Health Organization Western Pacific Regional Office; Dr Umezawa, representative of Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan; Mr Sunoto, representative of ASEAN Secretariat; Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), it is my pleasure and honor to extend my warmest welcome to all the participants.

Let me first briefly introduce ASEF and the Asia-Europe Meeting. In March 1996, the leaders of 25 European and Asian countries together with the President of the European Commission, convened in Bangkok, Thailand for the inaugural Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). An important goal of this Asia-Europe partnership is to share the responsibilities in building greater understanding between the peoples of both regions through closer people-to-people contacts. Strengthened dialogue on an equal basis between Asia and Europe in a spirit of cooperation and through the sharing of perceptions on a wide range of issues would also enhance mutual understanding and benefit both regions.

The ASEM partnership began with 15 EU member states and ten Asian countries (Brunei, China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) in 1996. ASEM later saw its first enlargement at the Fifth ASEM Leaders' Summit in Hanoi in 2004, where ten new EU Member States (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and three new ASEAN countries (Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar) were officially admitted to ASEM. A subsequent round of enlargement in 2007 brought in Bulgaria, India, Mongolia, Pakistan, Romania and the ASEAN Secretariat, increasing the grouping to a total of 45 partners. And by the end of this year, ASEM will see a further enlargement with Australia, New Zealand and Russia being admitted at the summit in Brussels in this October, bringing the total to 48 partners in all.

ASEF, which was established by the ASEM Leaders shortly after their first Summit, remains to this day the only permanent institution of the ASEM process. It is funded by voluntary contributions from its partner governments and shares the financing of its projects with its civil society partners across Asia and Europe. The mission of ASEF is to promote greater mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchange. Through ASEF, civil society concerns are included as a vital component of deliberations of the ASEM.

At their 7th ASEM Summit held in Beijing in October 2008, ASEM Leaders reiterated their commitment to collaborate on pandemics and infectious diseases. As a result, the ASEM Initiative for the Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza was launched at the 9th ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Hanoi, in May 2009. This ASEM Initiative established a stockpile of anti-viral drugs and personal protective equipment (also known as PPE) and built the "ASEF Network for Public Health", which is the first platform dealing with public health issues of common interest to Asia and Europe.

For the stockpile component, a Memorandum of Agreement spells out the cooperation of three parties: the Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Gaimusho*), WHO (the World Health Organisation) and ASEF. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan and WHO are in charge of the technical decision-making on the stockpile deployment and other supportive activities, while ASEF plays the role of financial manager. Furthermore, the project includes procurement of the goods implemented by a specialised agent.

At the advice of the WHO and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan *Gaimusho*, ASEF concluded an Agent Agreement with the Japan International Cooperation System (JICS), which has acted as a procurement agent and an implementing agency for the stockpile project since May 2009. ASEF is informed about the progress of the procurement through the reports regularly submitted by JICS. Under this arrangement, the required goods are delivered and stored in a specialized warehouse in Singapore.

This Regional Workshop on Operational Preparedness for Early Response to Emerging Infectious Diseases is timely for two reasons. First, most of the stockpile is ready, so the concept of rapid containment is now more relevant than ever before. Second, we have the experience of the H1N1 pandemic influenza since May last year and we must now take stock of how regional response can support global efforts. Though we

found the incidence of H1N1 to be mild, until now at least, we have to continue to be vigilant for emerging infectious diseases including influenza with pandemic potential.

Finally, I wish to take this opportunity to thank WHO for taking initiative to organise this important workshop. I thank you for your participation and wish you a very fruitful meeting. I am confident that your deliberations at this regional workshop will contribute to strengthening regional health security against emerging infectious diseases, which ultimately contributes to global health security.

On behalf of the Asia-Europe Foundation, let me say again, thank you for being here. We also wish all participants a truly memorable sojourn in Singapore.