



## PRESS RELEASE

### ASEF Network for Public Health 1<sup>st</sup> Steering Committee Meeting

16 November 2009  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



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### **The Asia-Europe Foundation Network for Public Health announces 2010 action plan to promote bi-regional, multi-sector collaboration on pandemic influenza**

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) Network for Public Health is pleased to announce today a concrete action plan for the Network's activities in 2010. This plan was unanimously agreed to by the 10 partner organisations from Asia and Europe which were represented at the 1<sup>st</sup> Steering Committee Meeting organised by ASEF.

The consequences of a pandemic outbreak are devastating. As previously illustrated by the socio-economic damages brought by the spread of SARS in 2003, the current H1N1 outbreak has caused a death toll of at least 5,000 and inflicted over 400,000 people worldwide. To prepare Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) partner countries for pandemic infectious disease outbreaks, the action plan is aimed at minimising the social and economic impact of such outbreaks in both regions through the exchange of knowledge and experience as well as collaboration on policy and strategy development.

As part of the ASEM Initiative for the Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza, funded by the Government of Japan, the ASEF Network for Public Health constitutes the first platform between Asia and Europe on public health issues. With a particular focus on pandemics and infectious diseases and adopting a multi-sectoral approach towards its activities, the Network was put in place in 2009 for an initial period of five years.

'Multi-sector collaboration and bi-regional preparation is crucial for the effective containment and response to pandemic threats,' according to Mr. Takehiro OKUBO, Director of ASEM Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan. He added: 'Japan is taking the lead on the ASEM Initiative and it is indeed heartening to see what has been achieved by the Network since May this year.'

Building on the successful gathering of the Network's partner organisations across Asia and Europe since its inception in May 2009, the Network has formulated a practicable, all-encompassing action plan to be implemented across the regions and sectors in the coming year. Towards this end, the Network has formed three thematic working groups focusing on key areas identified for action: (1) Regional Integration and Infectious Diseases; (2) Multi-sector Pandemic Planning and Response; and (3) Public Health Dialogue.

The thematic working group on "Regional Integration and Infectious Diseases" will promote transfer of experience and working methods between the two regions. To this end, the working group will invite academics and research institutions to submit proposals through its corporate website ([www.asef.org](http://www.asef.org)) in 2009. The research study is expected to analyse the existing regional and cross-regional mechanisms in Asia and Europe on surveillance, detection and containment of emerging infectious diseases. The purpose is to identify any possible gaps in the existing mechanisms and recommend

areas of collaborations that will better synergize the regional, integrated effort on infectious disease containment. The activities to be planned by the thematic working group will therefore be based on the findings of the research.

The thematic working group on “Multi-sector Pandemic Planning and Responses” will organise a series of scenario building workshops to enhance the pandemic preparedness capabilities of ASEM member countries throughout the year in various Asian and European countries. During these workshops, national organisations from multiple sectors will come together to build a framework of action plans based on different pandemic-related scenarios. Under the guidance of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), strategic plans will then be developed and disseminated in 2011. Close working relationships will be established among the participants to ensure strategic alignment and concerted efforts among the ASEM partner countries.

Finally, for the thematic working group on “Public Health Dialogue”, the Network leverages on ASEF’s strength and expertise in developing common platforms for exchange. Tapping on its existing resources, ASEF will organise a number of projects, including the annual ASEF University, a two-week academic enrichment programme, which will be organised in partnership with the Medical University of Lodz, Poland. ASEF will also publish a special issue of the “Asia-Europe Journal”, its quarterly journal on interdisciplinary and intercultural studies and research between Asia and Europe, to enhance the network’s visibility and generate public awareness of the issues at hand. Both projects shall focus on the theme of “Public Health and Vulnerable Groups”.

‘While the next pandemic threat cannot be predicted, we, together with the Network’s partners and ASEM members, are confident that the Network has taken a relevant and appropriate approach to address the complex issue full of challenges and uncertainty,’ said Amb. Dominique GIRARD, Executive Director of ASEF. ‘Our strategy will enable us to fulfill our ultimate goal of enhancing general public awareness for better pandemic preparedness and control.’

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## Notes to the Editor

### Partners of the ASEF Network for Public Health

1. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan – Donor
2. World Health Organization Western Regional Pacific Organization – Technical Advisory Agency
3. Asia-Europe Foundation – Implementing Agency
4. The ASEAN Secretariat – Regional Strategic Partner
5. The European Commission – DG Health and Consumers – Health Threats Unit – Regional Strategic Partner
6. Nestle – Business Sector Partner
7. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – Asia Pacific Zone – NGO Partner
8. International Organisation for Migration – Technical Advisory Agency
9. United Nations System Influenza Coordination – Technical Advisory Agency
10. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – Pandemic Influenza Contingency – Technical Advisory Agency

### Co-sponsoring countries for the ASEM Initiative for the Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza

Hungary, Republic of Korea, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Pakistan, Poland, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam

### Other ASEM partner countries

Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Italy, Malaysia, Malta, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Myanmar, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom

## About the organisers



The **Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)** advances mutual understanding and collaboration between Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges. These exchanges include conferences, lecture tours, workshops, seminars and the common use of web-based platforms. The major achievement of ASEF is the establishment of permanent bi-regional networks focussed on areas and issues that help to strengthen Asia-Europe relations.

Established in February 1997 by the partners of the **Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)**, ASEF reports to a board of governors representing the ASEM partners. ASEF is the only physical institution of the ASEM process. Since 1997, the Foundation has initiated projects engaging 15,000 individuals from Asia and Europe. ASEF works in partnership with other public institutions and civil society actors to ensure its work is broad-based and balanced among the partner countries. [www.asef.org](http://www.asef.org)



The mission of the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan** is "to aim at improvement of the profits of Japan and Japanese nationals, while contributing to maintenance of peaceful and safe international society, and, through an active and eager measure, both to implement good international environment and to keep and develop harmonic foreign relationships."

Recognising that the prevention and control of novel influenza can only be achieved through close collaboration at both regional and international levels, the government of Japan has implemented several measures and capacity building which include assistance in stockpiling of antiviral drugs and other prevention equipment for early response, communication campaign in rural areas and enhancement of surveillance through international organisations, promotion of research, training courses and dispatch of experts, etc. [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp)