

Dear Dr H. Wan Alkadri S.S. MSc., Director of Environmental Health at the Ministry of Health,

Dear Mr Sharad Adhikary, Environmental Health Adviser at WHO Indonesia

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to open this regional seminar on “The impact of climate change on health in South-East Asia.” That there is an obvious correlation between climate change and health has now become widely accepted as the adoption of WHA Resolution 61/19 has clearly demonstrated. This resolution, calling for decisive measures to be taken on the topic of health and climate change, is of momentum importance since it was signed by the 193 countries represented at the World Health Assembly.

In the recent past, France has been very active in underlining the urgency of taking concrete action in this field on the world scene. It co-organized with WHO a Conference in Libreville in 2008 and environmental health is among the priorities of the agreement signed between WHO and the French government. The issue of health and climate change is one of the four priorities of the French Regional Delegation for health, whose representative was instrumental in organizing this seminar. At a national level, the French government has set up an interdepartmental committee involving senior civil servants from both the Ministry of health and that of environment and sustainable energy. And, as many Indonesian colleagues present today know, France, through the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) is supporting the Indonesian government in the definition of a global and integrated public policy on climate change (a policy matrix on climate change). All this shows France’s commitment in favour of a global approach to the problem ; indeed it is our belief that the issue of health and climate change can only be tackled in the more general context of sustainable development.

The purpose of this three-day seminar is to be a think tank to examine the implications of climate change on health more specifically here in South East Asia. It seems to me it is a particularly relevant initiative. Let me briefly explain why. First, it cannot be denied that there are regional particularities in the way climate change affects different parts of our world and it is therefore important to study this issue in relation to a given climactic environment. Secondly, it seems hardly disputable that the prevalence of infectious and transmissible disease will be enhanced if the climate becomes hotter and more humid as it is in this part of

the world. But more importantly, it is also a well known fact that the health systems of some countries in South East Asia are still very vulnerable and more likely to be at risk in the event of climate changes affecting them.

Because of these specificities, because of the urgency of the situation and in this respect, the pandemic of swine flu that has erupted lately is a reminder of how quickly infectious diseases can spread in our global world, a regional approach seems highly appropriate especially if it is integrated in the broader perspective of sustainable development. In this respect, Indonesia, has taken several initiatives lately – the Jakarta commitments, the Manado Conference on the future of our oceans, etc. - which indisputably makes it a perfect forum for such a seminar as the one you are attending today.

To conclude, ladies and gentlemen, I would like once again to thank the Indonesian ministry of Health and the WHO for their active support to implement this regional initiative and I wish you all a pleasant stay in Jakarta and above all a fruitful seminar that will hopefully help define a road map for the future in an area where international cooperation will increasingly matter.