STATEMENT BY DR BOUNPHENG PHILAVONG
REPRESENTATIVE, ASEAN SECRETARIAT

Chairman, Your Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates:

It is a great privilege for me to represent the ASEAN Secretariat at this 58th Session of WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific held in this beautiful island of Jeju, Republic of Korea.

Since this is my first intervention, I would like to congratulate you on your election as Chairperson of this 58th Session. I also would like to take this opportunity to congratulate WHO for the Western Pacific headed by Dr Shigeru Omi for significant success and achievements during the past year.

Mr Chairperson,

As you are aware seven out of ten ASEAN Member Countries namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam belong to this WHO region. Only Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand belong to WHO Southeast Asia Region.

Let me briefly introduce you on what ASEAN has been doing in regional cooperation on health development, particularly on ASEAN-WHO cooperation in public health sector.

ASEAN vision 2020 aims to build a community of caring societies, which is secure from threats of diseases, poverty and social ills. People are at the core of this vision, and people are core to its realization.

At the Second ASEAN Plus Three Health Ministers Meeting held on 22 June 2006 in Yangon, Myanmar, the ASEAN Health Ministers and their counterparts from the People’s Republic of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea endorsed a Joint Statement on “Unity in Health Emergency”. The Health Ministers reaffirmed their commitment for closer collaboration in addressing key priorities for health development policy coordination, especially in meeting commitments made with regard to the International Health Regulations. The ASEAN Ministers also invited their Plus Three counterparts to join hands with ASEAN in addressing health and nutrition promotion in the context of meeting health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and implementation of the International Health Regulations adopted in 2005, with particular focus on responding to public health emergencies of international concern.
In January this year, at the 12th ASEAN Summit held in Cebu, Philippines, the ASEAN Heads of States and Governments had endorsed two important Declarations relevant to health namely (i) ASEAN Commitment on HIV and AIDS; and (ii) ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the rights of the Migrant Workers.

In following-up on these two Declarations, in the public health sector, ASEAN is implementing Third ASEAN Work Programme on HIV and AIDS and had submitted a regional proposal to Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria for its Round 7, 2007 funding. The regional proposal focuses on “Scaling Up the Regional Response to Address the HIV and AIDS Vulnerabilities among Migrant and Mobile Populations in ASEAN Region”.

Mr Chairperson,

In complying with ASEAN Vision 2020 on Caring Societies, collaboration and partnership between ASEAN and WHO is crucial.

Both WHO and ASEAN have value-add in facilitating and coordinating regional follow-up on health development issues of concern.

The collaboration with WHO can be traced back in 1979 when the WHO first extended assistance for the ASEAN Technical Cooperation Programme in Pharmaceuticals.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ASEAN and WHO was implemented first from 1997 to 2002 and extended to 2007, which signified renewed and intensified collaboration between the two organization. Nine potential broad areas have been covered by this MOU, including (i) prevention and control of specific communicable diseases, (ii) prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases; (iii) environmental health; (iv) essential drugs; (v) new emerging and re-emerging diseases; (vi) nutrition and food safety; (vii) dissemination and sharing of information; (viii) human resources development; and (ix) communicable diseases control in border areas.

Under the MOU, the ASEAN-WHO Two-Year Strategic Action Plan (2006-2007) is now being implemented. The Action Plan covers four following broad areas: (i) coordination to follow up on regional recommendations on avian influenza prevention, control and responses, especially for pandemic preparedness; (ii) implication of trade liberalization on the health sector; (iii) improvement of the capacity of ASEAN health ministries in health leadership, policy development and in addressing health-related multi-sectoral issues; and (iv) healthy lifestyles and nutrition promotion.

ASEAN-WHO collaboration is based on the comparative advantage of both organizations, and has helped tremendously ASEAN in realizing priorities identified by ASEAN Health Ministers and their senior officials to realize a Healthy ASEAN by 2020 in addressing disease surveillance and control, and the achievement of health-related Millennium Development Goals in ASEAN Member Countries.

ASEAN and WHO collaboration had made good progress. It has helped further intensifying responses to emerging threats from communicable diseases, environment degradation and increasing demands from the health system.

Among key activities that ASEAN has been collaborating with WHO during the past few years include:

- ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan, ROK) Emerging Infectious Diseases Programme Phase I (2004-2006) and Phase II (2007-2009). The programme is funded by the Australian Government. The objective of the programme is to enhance regional preparedness and capacity through integrated approaches to prevention, surveillance and timely response to
emerging infectious diseases. The programme has four key focus areas: (i) ASEAN Member Country and ASEAN Secretariat Institutional Strengthening; (ii) Enabling Environment for Preparedness; (iii) Prevention and Risk Reduction; and (iv) Surveillance and Response.

- ASEAN- Japan Project on Regional Stockpiling of Tamiflu and Personal Protective Equipment under the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF) for the Containment of Pandemic Influenza in ASEAN. WHO has provided significant technical assistance in implementing this project, and had helped in organizing and leading a Regional Panstop Exercise held in April 2007. This was a rapid-containment exercise that tested plans to avert an influenza pandemic.

- ASEAN-Japan Project on High Level Officials Meetings on Caring Societies, which just completed its fifth meeting last month in Tokyo. The series of meetings mainly addresses the issues related to marginalized and disadvantaged groups, such as elderly, people with disability, women and children.

- Technical assistance has also been provided to ASEAN by WHO in various health areas, including pharmaceuticals (IPR, counterfeit drugs, traditional medicines), healthy lifestyles (WHO had helped in developing a regional work plan on ASEAN Healthy Lifestyles, health cities and healthy islands); HIV and AIDS (increasing access to drugs, IPR, VCCT, treatment, care and support), and food safety.

I would like to take this opportunity again to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to WHO for cooperation and kind support. ASEAN is looking forward to continued cooperation, collaboration and partnership between ASEAN and WHO focusing on issues relevant to mandates of both organizations, and beneficial to the ASEAN Member Countries, with a view to develop stronger regional platform for health, and move forward a strategic agenda for health.

Thank you for your attention.