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**STATEMENT BY PROFESSOR JACK C. LING
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OF IODINE DEFICIENCY DISORDERS (ICCIDD)**

Dear Dr Omi and all the colleagues in the WHO-Western Pacific Region

On behalf of the entire membership of ICCIDD, including more than a hundred members in the Western Pacific countries, I present you our warmest greetings and wish all the participants a fruitful meeting. Cretinism and visible goiter have been associated with iodine deficiency for a long time, but IDD's most insidious and widespread threat is the invisible brain damage that it inflicts upon hundreds of millions of children beginning in utero until two years of age. Even a mild case of IDD can rob a child of up to 13 IQ points, which can mean the difference between a child with or without the ability to handle abstract tasks, learn a trade, or go to college.

In terms of harmful effects, IDD harms more people than many of the most feared scourges. Some two billion people in 130 countries are at risk. Yet, the way to fight IDD is well understood, and highly sustainable: the regular use of iodized salt for our food[†]

In the last decade, we have seen a tripling of the number of households using iodized salt. Some two billion more people have adopted the practice of using iodized salt, a phenomenal achievement in behavioural change for better health. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has singled out the fight against IDD as an example of public/private collaboration for development.

In 2003, it is estimated that 80 million additional newborns were protected against IDD. This amounted to a saving of over one billion IQ points. In addition to its social benefit, the impact of this achievement on society in terms of increased productivity is enormous. The

World Bank economists tell us that micronutrient malnutrition, including iodine deficiency, can reduce a country's GNP by 5%.

Impressive as this progress has been, two billion people are still not getting the required dosage of iodine and some 40 million annual newborns are suffering varying degrees of IDD. The UN General Assembly Special Session in 2002 reaffirmed the goal of virtual elimination, a goal originally adopted at the 1990 UN Summit for Children. It is now as set to be reached by 2005, a scant 14 months away, as part of the UN Millennium Development Goals, to which WHO is fully committed.

No WHO region has been spared iodine deficiency. PAHO and WPRO have made good progress, but many countries in EMRO, SEARO and AFRO lag behind. In EURO, Russia and the Central Asian countries saw resurgence of IDD after the dissolution of the Soviet Union but are beginning to make progress. Among Western European countries, evidences of mild to moderate iodine deficiency are found in Spain, France, Belgium, Germany and Italy.

In the Western Pacific Region, ICCIDD has collaborated with WPRO in a number of countries, including Viet Nam and Cambodia. However, more than 6 million newborns in this region are still entering the world every year without the protection of iodine. In Australia and New Zealand, there is also mild iodine deficiency. China has led the fight by reaching over 90% iodized salt household usage. However, this still leaves some 130 million Chinese unprotected mostly in sparsely populated and economically disadvantage areas. WHO, UNICEF, ICCIDD, and AusAID have worked closely with the Chinese Ministry of Health to work towards universal salt iodization.

In October 2003, under the auspices of the Global Network for Iodine Nutrition, China and UNICEF co-hosted an international meeting to review progress and identify strategic areas for action. Mme Wu Yi officiated at the meeting. The consensus adopted by the meeting calls for accelerated action by all Member States and outlines five strategic areas of action.

1. Periodic advocacy at the national and local levels to maintain the needed political will.
2. Provision of adequately iodized salt for use by all at an affordable price.
3. Social mobilization for community involvement to facilitate the behavioural change and to sustain the norm of using iodized salt.

4. Monitoring for iodine nutrition levels and quality assurance of iodized salt.
5. Building multidisciplinary national coalition to keep surveillance of iodine nutrition status and to prevent the return of IDD.

With the goal only 14 months away, now is the time to act. ICCIDD, the only organization dedicated solely to the fight against IDD, stands ready and eager to work with all Member States towards the Millennium Development Goal of sustained IDD elimination.

Thank you.