

ASEAN-Japan Health Ministers' Meeting:  
Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Population Ageing  
Opening remarks

Honorable Ministers, distinguished delegates, colleagues in global health, ladies and gentlemen,

Good Morning. As the Japan's Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, I would like to welcome you all. It is my great pleasure to host this ASEAN-Japan Health Ministers Meeting and to have you around the table today. I should like to sincerely appreciate Health Ministers from ASEAN Member States for taking your precious time to come all the way to Japan. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to Mr. Le Luong Minh, ASEAN Secretary-General, Dr. Shin Young-soo, WHO Regional Director for Western Pacific Region, as well as distinguished speakers and senior colleagues from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the WHO, St. Luke's International University and the National Center for Geriatrics and Gerontology for attending this meeting. Especially, I would like to thank Dr Sarah Barber, the new director of the WHO Kobe Center for supporting the Meeting.

At this moment, I declare the opening of the "ASEAN-Japan Health Ministers Meeting: Universal Health Coverage and Population Ageing".

We, namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and Japan, as well as the ASEAN Secretariat, the WHO, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, are here today to discuss UHC and population ageing issues which are inevitable challenges to the Asian community, and to seek further mutual cooperation and collaboration in our region.

Last year, Japan hosted the G7 Kobe Health Ministers' Meeting in September. One of the topics were "Attaining UHC focusing on Healthy and Active Ageing". Japan is well-known as a country ageing faster than the rest of the world at an unprecedented pace. However, I would like to highlight that countries that would age even at a faster pace are indeed among Asian countries sitting here today.

The SDGs set "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages"

as the Goal 3. We, Japan and ASEAN countries, have embraced this common goal backed by similar values as well as common cultural background, which prompted me to host this meeting to accelerate our collaborative endeavor toward achieving this goal.

At the first roundtable discussion today, we will discuss how to achieve UHC in a sustainable manner. We are facing complex health issues including infectious diseases, women's, children's and adolescents' health, non-communicable diseases, and ensuring access to new technologies and innovative medical products. Our challenge is to achieve sustainable UHC encompassing these complex health issues, while adapting to transition in demographic and disease structures and associated health service needs. I look forward to exchanging our views and experiences to overcome these challenges.

The second roundtable discussion is dedicated to promote integration of prevention, treatment and elderly care in communities which is all the more relevant in an ageing society. For the elderly people to promote truly healthy lives with dignity, it is essential to put people at the center of care combining health care, long term care, housing, and livelihood support services based on best available evidence at the community level. Although we are currently in different stages of population ageing, it is necessary to share our efforts and expertise to prepare for our common future challenges.

I would like to take advantage of this meeting to solidify our bonds for advancing policies to achieve UHC and overcome population ageing. As a region where economy and population ageing are both emerging, ASEAN and Japan should take the leadership in addressing these challenges. I am totally convinced that today's discussion will contribute to realize a peaceful and healthier region through our collective efforts.

Thank you for your kind attention.