DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL PRIMARY HEALTH CARE
Beijing Initiative for Responding to Challenges by Giving Priority to Health

On 1–2 November 2007, the International Conference on the Development of Rural Primary Health Care was held in Beijing. During the conference, the participants shared their experience in promoting primary health care, especially rural primary health care in their own countries. They have discussed the development strategy of rural primary health care in the 21st century and reached consensus that primary health care is the best approach to achieving health for all and a reliable guarantee for sustainable improvement in people’s health. The idea of primary health care advocated by WHO is an important guidance for achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Decades of practices in primary health care in China has proved that it is the unshirkable responsibility of the government to put people first and safeguard their rights to health; that promoting accessible health care for everyone, protecting and improving people’s health constitute an important cornerstone for the sustainable social and economic development; that achieving a balanced development of urban and rural health by putting rural and remote areas in priority and empowering the people of all walks of life to share the development outcomes provide a strong guarantee for the enhancement of social harmony; and that emphasizing prevention and giving full play to the traditional medicine during the course of introducing modern medical technologies is an effective approach to bringing down the health cost and leveraging the benefits of health care. The cause of global health in the 21st century is facing a lot of opportunities as well as challenges. The tasks specified in the Millennium Development Goals require us to assume due responsibilities. Both developed and developing countries need to overcome a series of emerging problems such as unbalanced social and economic development, changes in disease spectrum, shortage and irrational allocation of health resources, increased population migration. Working out the solutions to these difficult problems is a test of the vision and wisdom of the governments of individual countries.

“Health is the foundation for overall development of human society”. The health condition of the people in a specific country brings direct impact on its overall economic development and represents the level of its overall social advancement. Transforming the ideas into actions and giving priority to promoting health of the people in the rural and remote areas is key to the realization of “health for all”. Therefore, we the Ministry of Health of Peoples’ Republic of China, on behalf of Chinese government propose the following measures be adopted:

1. Government’s responsibilities in promoting primary health care shall be clearly
defined. Government shall incorporate the primary health care into their work objectives and social and economic development planning, with government’s responsibilities stressed and the health policy improved. An inter-jurisdictionally coordinated primary health care work mechanism participated by the whole society shall also be established.

2. Greater importance shall be attached to the development of the health care in rural and remote areas. The government shall include the rural areas as a whole and promote an equity-oriented health policy. A health funding mechanism with preference being given to the rural and remote areas shall be set up to provide guarantees for the sustainable development of the primary health care.

3. A sound primary health care service network shall be built. A primary health care service network targeted at the rural and remote areas in line with the actual conditions of each individual country shall be constructed in order to provide safe, efficient and accessible medical and health care services.

4. Priorities shall be given to the development of human resources for the rural and remote areas. Investment in human resources shall be increased to develop a sizable pool of talents. And an effective mechanism to attract and retain quality health workers in rural areas shall be established.

5. The rural medical insurance system shall be improved. A medical insurance system that covers all rural residents shall be established to effectively reduce the farmers’ burden of medical expenses and secure their access to the basic medical and health services.

6. Feasible health technologies shall be extended and applied. Reliable, cost-effective and popular health technologies shall be promoted in the rural and remote areas, while giving full play to the advantages and roles of the traditional medicine in the primary health care.

7. Prevention shall be stressed. Strengthen health promotion and advocate a healthy philosophy of life through enhancing the health awareness and self-health care capabilities of the residents.

8. International exchanges and cooperation shall be strengthened. A closer partnership shall be established among the member states to share the success experience and technologies in primary health care.

The Chinese government hereby makes the following commitments:

1. To formulate national development program for rural primary health care and incorporate it into the government work plan and the objectives for social and economic development.

2. To increase government input to health development in rural and remote areas and
ensure the increased health expenditures be mainly utilized for rural and remote areas. Transfer payment to the poor areas shall be strengthened in order to provide adequate funds for the operation of rural public health institutions and the prevention and treatment of major infectious diseases.

3. To establish rural health service system covering all rural and remote areas in the country. Efforts shall also be made to strengthen the construction of rural health care facilities, enhance service capacity and provide safe and effective public health services and basic medical services for the rural residents.

4. To be dedicated to the development of human resources for health for the rural and remote areas. Dedication shall also be made to establish a long-term mechanism to promote urban support to rural health care and to support the applied research and extend feasible health technologies while giving full play to the role of the traditional medicine in the primary health care.

5. To push forward in an all-round way the development of rural medical security system. A fund-raising mechanism shall be established with government leadership, public funding and individual’s participation. The standards of this system shall be gradually upgraded with the economic development. By year 2010, to reach the goal that the rural medical security system basically covers all rural residents. At the same time, a medicaid system targeted at the rural poor people shall be set up to improve their basic health care.

Health is an eternal pursuit of human being. Serving as the driving force for social development, health itself is the goal of social development. Let us work together from this new starting point toward the realization of “health for all” as well as the realization of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations.

May our society develop in harmony and our people enjoy health.