Message from the Regional Director

I am pleased to present to you the annual report on the work of the World Health Organization (WHO) in the Western Pacific Region over the past year. For nearly nine years, we have been working together to improve health and well-being for the nearly 1.9 billion people in the Region.

Those experiences provide a clear vantage point for gauging our progress and, more importantly, for overcoming challenges we will face going forward. Even as health finally takes its rightful place at the centre of the global development agenda, our special relationship of trust and true partnership will continue to be the engine that drives progress in health in the Region.

Western Pacific Member States can take pride in their achievements over the past year. Our Region continues to combat communicable diseases on all fronts, with significant gains against hepatitis, HIV, malaria and tuberculosis. We now have greater capacity to fight emerging and re-emerging diseases, including pandemic influenza, and to respond to health emergencies and disasters. Our health systems are stronger, and we are doing a far better job promoting health and addressing the risk factors that drive the epidemic of noncommunicable diseases.

WHO has reinvented itself in the Western Pacific Region over the past nine years. We have been guided by a clear vision – Keeping Countries at the Centre – based on what you, our Member States, have told us are your national priorities.

Since reforms started in 2009, we have focused our efforts on results at the country level, regardless of what level of support WHO is providing. This focus in the Region has made WHO – to borrow the motto from our very first reform workshop – Fit for the Future.

This revitalization will allow WHO in the Western Pacific Region to better support Member States as they work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – which will guide global development until 2030 with a vision to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy health, peace and prosperity.

At the time of last year’s annual report, implementation of the SDGs was just beginning. I promised that WHO would work ever more closely with Member States to enhance capacity to achieve these ambitious goals. At the October 2016 session of the Regional Committee, Member States adopted the Regional Action Agenda on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Western Pacific.

Our commitment does not end with an action plan or a strategy. It just begins. We recognize that partnership and whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches are needed if we are to achieve the loftiest goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – ensuring no one is left behind as we work towards a healthier and more equitable, prosperous and sustainable world.

This vision demands that we actively seek new partnerships and alliances. The chapters in this report demonstrate the various ways we are doing this – from work on immunization, neglected tropical diseases and antimicrobial resistance to health security, health systems and increased capacity to respond to health emergencies and disasters.

Such partnerships can be seen in endeavours such as the 9th Global Conference on Health Promotion in Shanghai, hosted by WHO and China. The conference brought together nearly 2000 decision-makers, including more than 100 mayors and municipal leaders from around the world, who committed to make their cities healthier. The resulting Shanghai Declaration on Promoting Health in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Shanghai Consensus...
on Healthy Cities 2016 will ensure multi-sectoral action to promote better health.

Another productive alliance has been the Asia-Pacific Regional Forum on Health and Environment, which met at the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific in October 2016. Health and environment ministers around the Region shared their views on how to address the health impact of environmental issues, especially climate change.

Lawmakers also play a key role in promoting better health, and the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific last year requested us to engage more actively in the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum on Global Health. At the forum’s second meeting in November 2016 in Seoul, Republic of Korea, WHO supported policy-makers and political leaders as they worked to build bridges – across societies and borders – that will lead to better health for all.

These kinds of partnerships will be critical in delivering on the promise of the SDGs. WHO remains committed to working in sync with Member States, multilateral agencies, donors, nongovernmental organizations and other partners that can play a role in ensuring no one is left behind in the drive towards better health and sustainable development.

When I began this job nearly nine years ago, I emphasized to my staff that WHO is a Member State-driven organization. Our emphasis on the SDGs, on communicable and noncommunicable diseases, on health emergencies, and on building stronger health systems and promoting better health have one thing in common – you, our Member States. We serve the priorities of our Member States and their people. The number one mission of WHO in the Western Pacific Region must always be supporting Member States in their efforts to ensure better health outcomes.

I assure you that over the final year and a half of my term – indeed until my very last day in office – my staff and I will work tirelessly to improve the health – and the lives – of the people in all the countries and areas of the Western Pacific Region.

Thank you.

Shin Young-soo, MD, Ph. D.
Regional Director