I am pleased to present my 10th and final annual report on the work of the World Health Organization (WHO) in the Western Pacific Region. The report highlights our achievements over the past year, as well as challenges that will continue to confront WHO and our Member States in the years to come.

Ten years ago, it was the honour of my life to be elected as the fifth WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific. I was also the first Regional Director to come from outside the Organization.

When I began, Member States made it clear to me that they wanted WHO to get back to basics by providing guidance and solutions that directly addressed their needs. From my first day on the job, putting countries at the centre of the work of WHO has been my focus. To achieve this, we have spent the past 10 years changing the way WHO works in the Region.

We began by getting our own house in order: reorganizing the Regional Office so it was better set up to deliver for our Member States. I pushed staff to get out of their “silos” and work in a more cross-cutting and effective manner with serving countries foremost in their minds. I still remember the surprise on people’s faces when I would ask, “Who pays your salary? Member States, that’s who you serve!”

We established the Division of Pacific Technical Support to better address the unique health issues of Pacific island countries and areas. We revitalized the country cooperation strategy process with countries taking the lead. And we have done our best to ensure that country representative offices have the resources and capacity needed to make a difference where it matters most, on the ground.

We have worked to improve governance. In consultation with you, our Member States, we have adopted a more transparent and inclusive process for developing the Regional Committee agenda, as well as more vigorous consultation for regional action plans. These changes have dramatically improved the quality of the resolutions and action plans the Regional Committee adopts – and the results that they deliver. Now when Member States set a target, we all work together to get it done.

There have been many other organizational and management changes in our drive to be more efficient, effective and accountable.

We have improved our communications. We have strengthened our work with partners, such as the network of WHO collaborating centres. And we have worked to develop closer relationships with influential stakeholders such as parliamentarians. In a world where health threats come largely from outside the health system – and where the development landscape is increasingly complex and crowded – investing in better partnerships and stronger communications is more important for WHO now than ever before.

During my time, I have been fortunate to travel all across the Region. I have sat with communities in the Pacific that are worried about what climate change means for their future. In rapidly developing countries, people have shared concerns about keeping their loved ones healthy and safe amid constant change. I have listened to families – from remote Mekong villages to the great plains of Mongolia – who wonder how they will get the health services they need in the future.
I am grateful for every one of these conversations. They have helped me to stay focused on our mission: to serve the 1.9 billion people who call the Western Pacific Region home. And they have helped make WHO more efficient and effective at delivering on the needs of the people in all 37 countries and areas in the Region.

I am also proud of the Organization and its record of service that the next Regional Director will surely build upon. Whoever succeeds me is blessed with a tremendous staff and hard-working Member States to give them a head start in managing the health challenges of the future.

Finally, I am eternally grateful to Member States for your tireless support during my tenure as Regional Director. Thank you for the trust you placed in me. Serving you has been my enormous privilege and pleasure.

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