

MESSAGE**Dr Soe Nyunt-U**

WHO Representative to the Philippines

Colleagues, magandang umaga po and welcome to the Philippines. Thank you to the organisers for inviting WHO to be part of this important seminar.

Improvements in food and transportation technologies, together with the globalization of the marketplace, and changes in work expectations and hours, have led to an increase in consumer demand for readily accessible and easily prepared processed food. Associated with this is an increase in the international distribution of raw materials, food ingredients, food additives and food products. While international distribution adds to the diversity of food available to consumers, it also has the potential to result in the cross-border distribution of food that is not safe. Every week, new outbreaks of foodborne disease are reported in the media. With the increase in international trade and travel, outbreaks which were once limited to local communities, can now affect several countries.

WHO estimates that foodborne and waterborne diarrhoeal diseases kill about 2.2 million people annually; 1.9 million of them are children. The World Health Assembly, the highest governing body of the WHO, adopted a resolution in 2000 to recognize food safety as a significant public health concern. This resolution is as important today, as it was a decade ago, with significant public health, economic and societal impacts associated with foodborne disease evident in both developed and developing countries.

WHO aims to work with Member States to develop their national food control programmes with the overall goal of improving public health through the reduction in foodborne disease. This is an enormous ongoing task and working in partnership with other UN organizations such as FAO and UNICEF, and other forums such as APEC and ASEAN, is important for success. Developed countries also have a vital role in sharing information, experiences and expertise with developing countries. Only through these partnerships will we see improvement in national food control systems.

As the saying goes, 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure', and this is true in food safety. Effective food safety programmes, based on Good Hygienic Practices and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point System (HACCP) and risk-based imported food programmes are important preventive features of national food control systems to avert foodborne disease caused by unsafe food. However, it is acknowledged that from time to time, such systems do fail. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to have effective food recall systems in place, to ensure the removal of unsafe food from sale, and to also inform consumers of the risk so that appropriate preventative action can be undertaken.

The 2000 resolution also encouraged Member States to develop and implement systematic and sustainable preventive measures aimed at significantly reducing the occurrence of foodborne disease. The development and implementation of food recall systems is considered sustainable and preventive in reducing foodborne disease.

I wish you a fruitful seminar on this important topic and thank you all for the partnership approach displayed in this seminar.

Maraming salamat po.