

Islamabad Declaration on Health and Population (July 2005)

We, the Health Ministers of the Member States of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) adopt the following Islamabad Declaration on Health & Population during the Second Conference held on July 15-16, 2005, at Islamabad, Pakistan:

Recalling the decisions taken in the Seventeenth Meeting of the Technical Committee on the Health, Population Activities and Child Welfare in Colombo (August 12-14, 1999), and the First Conference of SAARC Health Ministers in New Delhi (November 15, 2003);

Also recalling the emphasis placed by the Heads of State or Government at the Eleventh SAARC Summit in Katmandu (January 4-6, 2002) and Twelfth SAARC Summit in Islamabad (January 4-6, 2004) on evolving a common regional strategy to combat HIV/AIDS, TB, Malaria and other deadly communicable diseases;

Recognizing the urgent need felt by the SAARC Council of Ministers Meeting in Kathmandu (August 21-22, 2002) to cooperate on the entire gamut of health issues confronting the region;

Appreciating the initiative taken by Maldives in hosting the Emergency Meeting of the SAARC Health Ministers on SARS Epidemic, in Male' (April 29, 2003) and reaffirming the commitment of SAARC Member States to strengthen cooperation in taking measures to prevent and control the spread of SARS in the region;

Recognizing the importance of decision taken in the First Conference of SAARC Health Ministers in New Delhi (November 15, 2003), for increased cooperation, sharing of information and knowledge, and pooling of resources to meet various health challenges in the region;

Inspired by the inaugural address of His Excellency Mr. Shaukat Aziz, Prime Minister of Pakistan, for setting the tone and direction for forging a SAARC partnership to effectively address various issues of Health and Population in the region;

Realizing the high population density, widespread poverty, malnutrition, high prevalence of communicable and non-communicable diseases, the unsatisfactory state of maternal and child health (MCH), lack of universal access to safe drinking water, sanitation and affordable, safe, efficacious, quality drugs in the region;

Affirming the determination to ensure that population remains a key area on the region's development agenda and population stabilization continues to be a high priority among the Member States; and

Reaffirming full political commitment to the overall improvement of the health and well being of the people of SAARC Member States by appropriately investing in Health and Population:

Urge upon Member States to:

1. ***Foster*** a collaborative environment and develop a mechanism for enhanced regional cooperation in Health and Population
2. ***Commit*** to the setting up of a regional institutional mechanism and establishment of national focal points within Ministries of Health and Population, to facilitate effective implementation of decisions agreed in the present declaration

3. **Facilitate** sharing of experiences, technical expertise and successes in the region in priority health and population areas within research, policy, programmes and health systems
4. **Reiterate** the decision of the First Conference of SAARC Health Ministers held in New Delhi, to enhance inter-country cooperation for emergency preparedness and regional disease surveillance and the establishment of a SAARC Disease Surveillance Center and Rapid Deployment Health Response System
5. **Commit** to working towards developing regional policies and programmes as well as effective partnerships in order to check illegal trade in drugs and medicines and regional / inter-regional movement of spurious, sub-standards drugs, food as well as narcotics and psychotropic substances
6. **Recommend** protection, promotion and mainstreaming of the traditional system of medicine in the healthcare delivery systems of member countries
7. **Agree** to establish an Expert Group on Population issues under the mandate of Technical Committee on Health and Population, to strengthen cooperation, exchange of experiences and policy dialogues in area of family planning and reproductive health to achieve common agenda of ICPD and Millennium Development Goals
8. **Call upon** all stakeholders including development partners to complement the region's efforts in achieving Millennium Development Goals and addressing other priority health and population issues.
9. **Allocate** a larger percentage of GDP for health, nutrition, population and related research

10. **Support** networking of National Research Institutions in conducting collaborative research projects to address regional health priorities and need to establish a regional research fund

11. **Agree** to explore the options of designating a Regional Public Health Institute

12. **Strengthen** regional mechanisms for exchange of faculty and students in disciplines of Medical Sciences and Public Health Education
