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**Statement by  
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TO THE ECOSOC ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW  
REGIONAL MINISTERIAL MEETING FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC  
ON “PROMOTING HEALTH LITERACY”  
Beijing, 29 April 2009**

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to join Ambassador Lucas in congratulating the Government of China for hosting this Regional Preparatory Meeting for the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review (AMR), as well as for volunteering to make a National Presentation at the 2009 Review in

because health is a foundation for prosperity, stability, poverty reduction and human development.

We must not waver. We must live up to our commitments. At the same time, we also need to learn to do more with less and to strengthen and grow our partnerships. This is why today

literacy is linked to education. It is an outcome which allows the public to change their lifestyles and conditions through awareness.

By helping people to navigate the health system, to engage in self-care and to participate in community action for health, improved health literacy can lead to health gains.

For instance, the negative impacts of obesity on health can be more effectively addressed if the people in the community are better informed, including on what the benefits are for communities of acting collectively to create an environment that is conducive to healthy eating and physical activity. Increased knowledge is bound to create healthier societies with less burden on the health systems and less expenditure on curative measures. The age-old adage of

Addressing unhealthy eating and tobacco use are two areas which provide the highest return on investment and where health literacy can have a significant impact. Greater health literacy can also contribute to improving maternal and child health, under-nutrition, or HIV/Aids infections.

The task of improving health literacy clearly cannot be tackled by the health sector alone. Empowering people to acquire and understand health information and prepare them to take adequate measures is a process, in which members of the education sector, the media, ICT and the business sector, among others, also need to be involved.

Health literacy is relatively low worldwide, both in developed and developing countries. In fact, it appears literacy is low worldwide. For instance in Australia, 60 per cent of the population has scored below a level regarded as optimal for health maintenance.

The development of a regional action plan to promote health literacy in the Asia and Pacific Region would be an important milestone. This meeting could call on the relevant actors, led by the World Health Organization, to consider initiating work on such a plan.

In the next two days, we are going to look at how collaboration among different sectors and different stakeholders can help improve health literacy levels. We will also share best practices and showcase initiatives that may be replicable in other countries. I am confident that our discussions will lead to effective recommendations on how to deploy health literacy to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the health-related goals and commitments.

We are lucky to have with us top-notch experts and policymakers and I am looking forward to two stimulating and productive days of discussions.

Thank you.