2021 Asia Pacific Leaders Dialogue for Malaria Elimination
Theme: Regional Collaboration for Malaria Elimination & Health Security

Call-to-action
Statement of Co-Chairs

COVID-19’s unprecedented impact on the Asia Pacific region’s economy and health systems has underscored the importance of building more resilient, responsive and better equipped health systems. The ongoing health crisis has placed regional health security and cross border collaboration atop all political agendas.

On December 13th 2021, the Royal Government of Bhutan, Asia Pacific Leaders Malaria Alliance and Asia Pacific Malaria Elimination Network, in partnership with WHO, the Global Fund and RBM Partnership to End Malaria hosted a high-level Leaders Dialogue focused on the theme ‘Regional Collaboration for Malaria Elimination & Health Security’. Participants featured regional leaders including H.E. Dr Tandi Dorji, Hon’ble Minister of Foreign Affairs, Her Excellency Dasho Dechen Wangmo, Hon’ble Minister for Health Bhutan, His Excellency Dr Mansukh Mandaviya, Hon’ble Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare India, His Excellency Senator the Hon the Hon Zed Seselja, Minister for International Development and the Pacific, Australia, His Excellency Dr Sophon Mekthon, Hon’ble Vice Minister of Public Health Thailand - as well as representatives from National Malaria Programs, World Health Organization, The Global Fund, RBM Partnership to End Malaria and other key international and regional global health organizations, donor agencies and civil society organizations.

With less than a decade left to reach the 2030 elimination goal as committed by 18 Asia Pacific Heads of States at the 9th East Asia Summit, and later by 4 additional Heads of State in 2018, there is increased urgency to step up the fight against malaria. Despite the ongoing global pandemic, we mustn’t lose sight of accelerating progress towards malaria elimination- a preventable and treatable disease which has already been eliminated from over forty countries around the world. Ministry of Health, Royal Government of Bhutan and APLMA-APMEN, therefore, urge countries to take the following actions to reach the shared vision.

- **Adopt a Whole of Government Approach by establishing/re-invigorating Inter-ministerial Task Forces to address cross-sectoral challenges in malaria elimination**

Malaria elimination requires the creation of a policy environment conducive to multi-stakeholder involvement across various sectors as it is not solely a health problem but a societal one. COVID-19 has also spotlighted the crucial need for collaboration among different ministries and sectors. Countries must adopt a whole-of-government approach and build strong inter-ministerial collaboration mechanisms to address challenges and eliminate malaria.
• Develop joint cross-border elimination plans to ensure effective implementation of harmonised activities at ground level

COVID-19 has reinforced what holds true for malaria as the oldest pandemic. Coordinated efforts among neighbouring countries for managing and containing outbreaks, case management and case and foci investigation are needed to achieve malaria elimination. Coherent, shared, actionable workplans that link key sub-national strategies - such as timely data sharing and regular coordination between malaria programs- to national level support, are crucial for tackling border malaria.

• Ensure sustained funding for malaria service delivery and establish synergy with broader health systems funding to create programmatic efficiency

The global response to malaria has been critical to the achievements made over the past 20 years. In many countries, external financing will continue to play a role in addition to technical support and advocacy efforts. Commitment from Ministries of Finance and other stakeholders who influence national budget allocation decisions is critical to both reaching the elimination goal as well as preventing reintroduction in countries that have eliminated malaria. Countries nearing elimination should implement transition plans to ensure continuity of the malaria program to achieve the goal and/or prevent resurgence. These investments, whether they are for improving surveillance and response systems, strengthening supply chain mechanisms, or building data management capacity - can be synergistic with other investments in pandemic preparedness and response which countries may make in the wake of COVID-19.

Dasho Dechen Wangmo  
Minister of Health  
Royal Government of Bhutan

Dr. Sarthak Das, DrPH  
Chief Executive Officer  
APLMA-APMEN