



Asia-Pacific countries call for stronger action on environment-health risks

Environment and health leaders of the Asia-Pacific Region meet to strengthen collaboration on climate change resilience, health issues arising from the impacts of environmental degradation, safe water and sanitation, and proper management of chemicals in pursuit of sustainable development.

The Asia-Pacific Regional Forum on Health and Environment, this time to be hosted by the Government of the Philippines spearheaded by the Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is a convergence that will integrate efforts among countries for better environments and better health across all the goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

DENR Secretary Regina Paz “Gina” L. Lopez said, “Sustaining and improving the quality of the environment to promote and enhance public health is key to achieving social justice. A healthy environment is a pre-requisite to socio-economic development and human well-being.”

“The only way forward to realize this is for member-states to adopt appropriate measures and actively work to attain the global targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and engage and ensure the participation of the private sector, non-government organizations (NGOs), the academe, civil society and the media in the implementation of good practices on SDG-related programs,” she said.

In reference to the SDG (Agenda 2030), the Manila Declaration on Health and the Environment proposes to enhance and ensure access to safely managed water and adequate sanitation both at home and in health care facilities; prioritize climate change adaptation, preparedness and resilience and invest in the proper management of chemicals and waste.

World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for the Western Pacific Dr. Shin Young-soo underlined the role of the Forum as a “concrete example of how we can best tackle emerging challenges when we come together and discuss issues of common concern openly.”

“Bold leadership is required to address the environmental determinants of health in our respective Regions. By effectively addressing environmental health risks we have the opportunity to save lives and mitigate unnecessary ill-health,” Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia, said, adding, “We must act now to convert our commitments and pledges into action.”

The Forum outlines that basic necessities for public health such as water quality, food safety, and clean air must be carefully managed. Be it haze in South-East Asia, air pollution in North Asia or sanitation and hazardous waste problems in the Pacific – and climate change, shaping up as the health challenge of the century that looms over all of humanity – it is imperative to create and sustain healthy communities by limiting pollution from power plants, factory farms and transport and at once building their resilience.

Speaking at the Forum, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Deputy Executive Director Ibrahim Thiaw pointed out, “Understanding environmental health challenges will be the key in supporting the realization of the Manila Declaration on Health and Environment.”

The Asia-Pacific Ministers of Health and Environment believe that through dialogue, sharing of information and collaboration both at national and regional levels, we can transform the lives and the health of the people and ensure the well-being of present and future generations.

The Regional Forum’s secretariat consists of the WHO Regional Offices of South-East Asia and the Western Pacific, and the United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for the Asia Pacific. It is an initiative of 14 countries (ASEAN + 4) to strengthen the cooperation of environment and health authorities within and among the countries.

At this Forum, all countries of the WHO regions of Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific were invited to attend, reflecting the interest of those countries in the activities of the Forum and recognition that environmental health concerns transcend all borders and that no countries should be left behind.

The Asia-Pacific Regional Forum is being held at the Sofitel Philippine Plaza on October 6 and 7, and the 4th Ministerial Meeting at the World Health Organization Headquarters in Manila on October 8, 2016. ###