Mr. President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Asian Group on Agenda Item 124 entitled “Global Health and Foreign Policy”.

Let me begin by thanking the delegation of Thailand for preparing this statement on behalf of the Asian group and also the delegation of Pakistan for coordinating the same as the Chair of the Open Ended Working Group on “Enhancing the role of the Asian Group in the UN Affairs”.

Mr. President,

I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General for his efforts in preparing the report under this agenda item. The report contains a rich and very timely discussion on the increasing prominence and relevance of global health issues in the international and foreign policy agendas. Furthermore, it highlights and follows important developments on the synergies between these two policy arenas. It suggests that mutual benefits and strengthened global health responses can result when we explore ways to enhance policy coordination and coherence between global health and foreign policy.

Mr. President,

The Asian Group fully acknowledges that global health has always been and continues to be a pressing concern on the international agenda. In September of this year, the General Assembly convened a High Level Plenary Meeting of its sixty-fifth session on the Millennium Development Goals, which was attended by an impressive number of high level dignitaries from around the world. Throughout the course of the
Summit, the international community was reminded of the important place occupied by health issues and the three health-related MDGs within the overall discussions on socio-economic.

Furthermore, the MDG Summit, and the outcome document in particular, also reaffirmed the interdependent nature of all the Millennium Development Goals, while underscoring that the best way to successfully accelerate achievement in any one MDG is through taking a holistic and comprehensive approach to all MDGs. Making progress on the health-related MDGs would therefore entail a multi-sectoral approach that places equal emphasis on the attainment of all the other goals ranging from poverty and hunger eradication, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women to promoting global partnership and achieving environmental sustainability, including necessary measures in the areas of safe water and sanitation.

In this regard, the Asian group supports "the Sustainable Sanitation; Five Year Drive" initiated by the United Nation Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB) as a follow up of the International Year of Sanitation 2008."

Among the health-related MDGs, a holistic and comprehensive approach is also pertinent and the Asian Group remains seriously concerned about the lack of progress, in particular, in ameliorating maternal, newborn and child health. In this respect, the Group welcomes the introduction of the Secretary-General's Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health and expects the strategy to be implemented by a broad range of partners in a well harmonized and integrated manner.

Mr. President,

The MDG Summit served as a strong reminder for the international community that the promotion of global health cannot be achieved in isolation. Despite the earnest efforts of all countries to promote and protect the right of every person to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, substantial gaps persist. It has become all too clear that we must reinvigorate our efforts to strengthen our national health systems so that we may be better able to deliver equitable health outcomes. In this regard, we must continue to build sustainable health systems and strengthen national capacities to deliver comprehensive, accessible, affordable and quality healthcare, including through providing and strengthening comprehensive and affordable community-based primary health-care services so as to ensure a continuum from health promotion and disease prevention.

Hence, the role of foreign policy and international cooperation cannot be overemphasized, in particular the role of aid targeted towards the health sector, ODA-related commitments, North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation in support of national plans and strategies, as well as innovative sources of financing.
Furthermore, global health must be a priority consideration when dealing with trade issues. We must continue to promote universal access to medicines, fairer access to vaccines -- in particular in situations of pandemics -- and increasing global vaccine production capacity.

The Asian Group also welcomes all health related initiatives at national, regional and global levels supporting the global health agenda. In this regard, the Asian Group looks forward to the Second Global Forum on Human Resources for Health, during the Prince Mahidol Award Conference, in Bangkok, Thailand in 2011.

Mr. President,

The Asian Group is of the view that in-depth discussions are best left to competent health professionals. However, the positive and perhaps even catalytic political support for promoting such discussions with a view to concluding them can and oftentimes must come from the General Assembly.

In the past, numerous high level meetings on important global health concerns were convened at the General Assembly. These have duly highlighted the fact that global health concerns are not addressed merely by medical responses, but require sustained political will and effective international cooperation and partnership. In this regard, the Asian Group supports the General Assembly’s continued engagement in global health concerns and looks forward to participating actively in the high level meetings currently being planned on the issue of non-communicable diseases as well as the United Nations Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Review in 2011.

Mr. President,

I wish to underline that a firm and collective commitment to global health is paramount to surmounting the multiple financial, economic and other crises and challenges that we face today and may face tomorrow. Considering that two of our members are part of the core group of seven “Oslo Group” countries behind the resolution being submitted under this agenda item today, I can assure you that the Asian Group stands ready to work closely with its partners in promoting global health around the world and looks forward to seeing the resolution adopted without a vote.

Mr. President,

In closing, allow me to say a few words in my national capacity on the progress made by India in the field of health. In 2005, we launched our flagship National Rural Health Mission, which continues to be perhaps one of the biggest interventions of its kind in the health sector in the world. This programme has helped us strengthen the public health infrastructure with the appointment of over 100,000 healthcare providers and over 700,000 trained community workers.
India is presently spending over US $ 3.5 billion each year on health services, with substantial expenditure on services aimed towards women’s and children’s health. Currently, India is focusing on strengthening its efforts in the 235 districts that account for nearly 70% of all infant and maternal deaths. We have also made commendable South-South cooperation in the field of public health. With our unique position as a source of cost-effective generic medicines, we are currently assisting many developing countries in ensuring easy and ready availability of affordable and quality vaccines and medicines to vulnerable people. We also call on all countries to support rather than hinder or create barrier to such legitimate efforts. We are also ready to provide technical assistance to other countries and share our experience in the field of public health.

In view of our commitment to global health, we are happy to co-sponsor the draft resolution “Global Health and Foreign Policy”.

I thank you, Mr President.

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