



**SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION
FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION
SECRETARIAT**

SECRETARY GENERAL

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF SAARC

WORLD TB DAY & SAARC TB DAY, 24 MARCH 2018

We are commemorating the World TB Day-2018, devoted to the theme, *Wanted: Leaders for a TB-Free World; You can make history; End TB*, with the commitment to eradicate TB from the region.

The post-2015 End TB Strategy envisions a world free of tuberculosis—zero deaths, disease and suffering due to tuberculosis, with the aim of ending the global tuberculosis epidemic by 2035. In this backdrop, observation of the World TB Day each year is a welcome opportunity to mobilize political and social commitment towards eliminating TB, which is a public health burden globally.

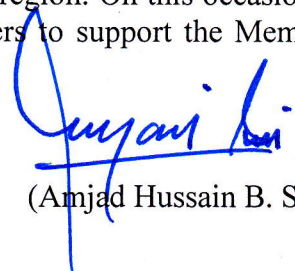
TB continues to remain the world's leading disease accounting for the deaths of nearly 1.7 million people each year and representing the ninth leading cause of deaths globally. With an estimated annual incidence of 3.8 million TB cases, the SAARC region carries 36% of the global burden of TB.

In addressing the problem of TB across the region, the SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre launched the SAARC Regional Strategy for Control/Elimination of TB in 2013. Since then, remarkable progress has been achieved through the implementation of the National TB Control Programmes in the Member States. Accordingly, the Maldives has set the deadline of 2020 for eliminating TB, while Bhutan and India have set the targets of 2023 and 2025, respectively. Likewise, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri-Lanka have also fixed the targets before the global timeline.

The newly developed Bangladesh regimen (SHORTER MDR-TB REGIMEN) for the treatment of MDR TB patients is found to be cost effective, with desirable level of cure. This procedure has been replicated in some of the Member States of SAARC.

In spite of good progress registered in the control of TB in the region, there still remains a large number of challenges, such as, high number of TB, MDR TB patients, TB and HIV/co-infection stigma and discrimination, Paediatric TB, poverty and cross-border and migration issues. In order to address these challenges, we need to mobilize sustainable financial and operational resources; develop technical and management capacity of professionals; introduce an effective supply management mechanism and national laboratory networks; and ensure early detection and interventions for TB/HIV and Drug Resistance TB.

As we observe the World TB Day-2018, I wish to call upon the Member States to redouble their efforts to address the challenges that impede the control of TB in the region. On this occasion, I also wish to appeal to regional and international development partners to support the Member States of SAARC in their fight against TB.


(Amjad Hussain B. Sial)