

In the case of the Avian and Influenza Pandemics, APEC in May 2006 had drawn up an Action Plan on Prevention and Response to them. APEC also has a Symposium on Emerging Infectious Diseases.

We are aware of multi-lateral effort in working on health and diseases. However, as parliamentarians, how can we be most useful, helpful and effective in dealing with these important issues? I would like to offer a few points for our deliberation:

1) Promotion of good health may be something common in developed and richer countries as it is also common wisdom among the educated around the world that good health is primary to the prevention of illnesses. But in poorer countries and among poorer and less educated people in our region, promotion of health is hampered not only by poverty but by commercialization of unhealthy food and dietary practices made worse by the globalization process. To provide a concrete example, youngsters of today have a taste for fast food, processed and packaged food with little nutritional values but laden with harmful sugars and chemical additives made by big multi-national food companies. Instead of having a banana or a simple fruit from nature, the young and the old alike are lured by advertisements and marketing techniques of food companies. The result is fairly obvious as we find child and teen obesity on the rise in many countries, especially in the urban areas.

2) How can conflictive and competing interests be handled cooperatively to ensure good health especially for the young? I'll offer an example here. As it is proven that breast milk is far superior to powder milk, the effort to promote breast feeding in many countries around the world is hampered by the major thrust or push of multi-nationals that sell powder milk which penetrate into hospitals where new-born infants are sometime given powder milk in the first days of their lives. Hence creating a dependency on powder milk, which often leads to the rejection of breast milk. Problem such as this needs to be solved cooperatively among nations.

3) The third issue to be raised here is on pandemics like the HIV-AIDS, SARS or Avian Flu. As research and development in these diseases are done more and better in some countries than others, the questions to be raised are:

1) Is knowledge, technique and know-hows in coping with them shared and exchanged adequately?

2) Can the cost of treatment be humanitarian and not strictly commercial? What can parliaments do to compel governments to

subsidize the cost of treatment and also to negotiate for favorable pricing of medication?

3) Is there open and transparent dissemination of information on every aspect and stage of the pandemics in order for the public to be educated and informed so they can help in combating the pandemic?

In light of the above, as parliamentarians we can advocate for laws that will ensure that open and transparent information on health, diseases, and pandemics be given to all citizens of our countries. Likewise, we can help to legislate laws that will ensure that the treatment procedures and protocols be known and made available because both education on and accessibility to treatments will help curb the spread of epidemics.

As parliamentarians we can also help to assist the health implementing agencies in their effort to seek cooperation and coordination among domestic and foreign partners to ensure health security. As has been witnessed over and over again, parliamentary oversight on important issues make policies and implementation of them move much faster than normal.

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**Address by Hon. Mrs. Juree Vichit-vadakan,
Member of the National Legislative Assembly of Thailand
on the Occasion of the 15th APPF Annual Meeting
on the theme “Cooperation in the Field of Ecology and Health,
Combating Epidemics”**

Honorable Chairman, Esteemed Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The topic of cooperation in the field of ecology and health, combating epidemics is hardly a new subject. In fact it has often been discussed in various multi-lateral and bilateral meetings. The United Nations and its specialized agencies have expert groups working on these topics as we speak.

However, as members representing parliamentary organization of one form or another, we as a collective, shoulder the important responsibility of introducing, legislating, reviewing, or amending laws that would have direct relevance to the issues we are discussing. It is therefore timely that we should examine our role and responsibility in order to be most effective in forwarding our input to help build and sustain an environment (both natural and man-made) that enhances quality of life for all.