

**Talking Points of the Union Minister for Health and Sports, Dr. Myint Htwe, at the
Opening Session of the workshop on “Tabletop Exercise (TTX) on Public Health
Emergency in Myanmar”**

Park Royal Hotel, Nay Pyi Taw

30th July 2018

- Appreciate and thank UNICEF country office, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF EAPRO), WHO country office, US CDC, USAID, all participants and all stakeholders who are here in this multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholders TTX workshop.
- It is the most appropriate and opportune time because we are suffering from flood situation in our country right now. We have not yet seen any public health emergency related to flood situation up to this point in time. We hope that the flood will recede soon.
- The following activities are being reviewed and updated so that we can systematically and efficiently deal with any public health emergency in future or not to have any public health emergency (PHE) at all.
- Reviewing and updating the map of disaster-prone areas for different types of disasters in the country
- Reviewing and updating checklists for use in disaster prevention and preparedness
- Reviewing and updating monitoring sheets or check lists for different aspects of disaster management (management procedures, administrative, logistics, technical). This is essential for us to properly manage public health emergencies in disasters.
- Disaster coordination networking or public health coordination networks need to be updated. This is the key to successfully managing public health emergencies in disaster. This is what we are going to do in this TTX.

- It is noted that quick and early disaster generic response system for different types of disasters is crucial. I am sure that different types of public health emergencies will be discussed in this TTX.
- Any small disaster is (natural/ man-made/ intentional/ accidental), in fact, a breeding ground for any public health emergency. Therefore, we need to treat all disasters equally in terms of its importance, irrespective of size or location or types of disasters. This notion should be ingrained in the minds of MoHS staff.
- We are also reviewing and updating the current scenario of disaster resilient health system. We are upgrading it within the context of available budget and support. We need strong, dynamic, responsive and resilient health system to cope up with public health emergencies.
- The key issue that you may practice in this tabletop exercise is “efficiency of information transmission system in managing public health emergencies”. This is one of the most crucial aspects to contain public health emergencies in a short period of time using fewer amount of resources. Otherwise, public health emergencies at the national level will become international level public health emergencies.
- We should also always be on alert on the incidence of even small public health issues. If we do not handle it properly at the very beginning, it will be blown out of proportion, and become uncontrollable. Therefore, we should contain any public health issue/ problem at the very beginning or as soon as possible.
- The reason for conducting this TTX is that we do not want to have a small public health emergency becoming state and regional public health emergency and not to further becoming national public health emergency, and then to international public health emergency.

- If a disaster occurs or if there is any public health emergency and if we are not doing systematically or properly carrying out preventive, promotive and management measures, there will be serious negative implications in terms of heavy loss from several aspects.
- Once public health emergency occurs, we have to use our scarce human resources working at different levels of our health care delivery system, unnecessary financial resources will have to be used, and there will be tremendous psychological stress and post traumatic disorders to all those affected. The situation will be unacceptable if there are several deaths due to public health emergency.
- For instance, if a person who died is a bread earner, what will happen to his or her family?
- Therefore, we have to regard each and every public health emergency as an important event and contain or control it as soon as possible.
- One of the supporting mechanisms by which we can prevent public health emergency or to contain the public health emergency efficiently is that we need to have a very strong, responsive, dynamic sentinel surveillance system.
- I am not talking about the full-fledged surveillance system, just sentinel surveillance system.
- It is high time that the staff of the Ministry of Health and Sports should review the current status of functioning of sentinel surveillance system.
- I would like to urge the Permanent Secretary and concerned Directors-General to review our currently functioning status of our sentinel surveillance system for different types of diseases.
- If the sentinel surveillance system is not functioning well, it is highly likely that there will be public health emergencies sooner than later.

- When you are doing this TTX, I am sure that you will elicit many strong points as well as weak points of our current health system in terms of managing public health emergency, issues in administrative, management, logistic, technical, coordination and communication.
- These issues will be put into the limelight while you are doing TTX.
- I am sure that this exercise will lead to developing and establishing a very good framework for Public Health Emergency Management.
- The beauty of this TTX is that we will expose all the parameters, determinants and predictors for the occurrence of a public health emergency. Based on that we can fine tune our Public Health Emergency Management System.
- We can also modify these parameters, determinants and predictors in the context of reducing the probability of occurrence of public health emergencies in our country.
- I would urge the Deputy Directors-General to collectively work on streamlining and updating our Public Health Emergency Management System to be more dynamic, responsive, resilient, accommodative, coordinative, flexible yet firm and strong.
- All public health professionals should be aware of the fact that Public Health Emergency Management is one of the foundation pillars of having a good public health system in the country.
- It is also important that we should always apply systems approach, systems perspective and from holistic point of view when we are reviewing the Public Health Emergency Management System. Otherwise, all our works will be disjointed. Disjointed approach is not acceptable.
- You may wish to recall that we have the very bitter experience in cyclone Nargis and Tsunami, because we were not well-prepared for that.

- I noticed that in Tsunami, we suffered a lot because people were not informed properly well ahead of the expected disaster. People were also not informed about the seriousness and the likely quantum of the disaster that is going to hit the country.
- In other words, there was weak communication or information transmission of Meteorological Department directives to the population living in that area.
- Because of that many untoward events had happened and several thousands of deaths occurred, which should not have happened that way.
- In this TTX, I am sure that you may have very differing viewpoints of health staff and the staff of other ministries. This is very conducive to achieving the objectives of the TTX.
- The way a particular issue is viewed by health staff will be totally different from the way viewed by staff of other ministries, NGOs or INGOs.
- These differing views may be in terms of severity, in terms of importance, in terms of subsequence implications, in terms of whether a particular issue is a priority or non-priority. It can clarify many contentious and ambiguous issues.
- That is very good. Only then, we can sort out and clarify many of the issues that we health staff are not exactly aware of it.
- That is why I would like to request the representatives from other ministries to speak out, and also pinpoint, or talk about the experience, and weaknesses or strengths of the Public Health Emergency Management System in the country. That is very important.
- So, I would like to urge the participants again to make the most out of this tabletop exercise (TTX).
- We had a Joint External Evaluation (JEE) being done in May 2017. As per the recommendations of JEE team, we need to formulate “National Multi-hazard Health

Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan”. We already had two workshops to develop the plan.

- This TTX will definitely help us identify major inputs to that plan.
- Therefore, this workshop is very crucial for our future Public Health Emergency Management System.
- In conclusion, this TTX
 - will elicit gaps in planning, training, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
 - can further explore current mechanisms of Public Health Emergency Management System and it can be updated or make it more effective and efficient;
 - can identify sub areas or sub domains of Public Health Emergency Management System that need to be strengthened.
- I do appreciate that you are doing TTX based on real scenarios:
 - cyclone/ Tsunami / earthquake / floods / civil unrest / famine / Rakhine situation / Kachin situation etc.
- I noticed that the most desirable point is the four objectives of the TTX, which are very realistic. Please work collectively to achieve the objectives of the workshop to the extent possible.
- After this exercise, we should have a small half-a-day meeting, chaired by Permanent Secretary or Director-General to quickly review the action points which will be coming out of this TTX.
- I would like to urge participants to make the most out of this TTX.
- At the end of the workshop we should have a small Focus Group Discussion (FGD) for conduct of future TTX. This should be done without involving the facilitators of

this workshop. For this particular purpose, a team from MoHS not involving in this TTX can help this out.

- Thank you.

(The speech is prepared by the Union Minister himself)