



**SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION
FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION
SECRETARIAT**

SECRETARY GENERAL



MESSAGE

**WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY
24 MARCH 2021**

The World Tuberculosis Day is observed every year on 24th March to mark the discovery of the bacterium causing Tuberculosis (TB) by Dr. Robert Koch in 1882. The Day is an opportunity to spread public awareness about the devastating health, social and economic consequences of TB as well as to make pledges for persistent efforts to end this global menace. The Day is also commemorated as the SAARC TB Day across the South Asian region.

In spite of the ongoing global efforts to control the spread of TB, it still remains one of the deadliest infectious diseases. Every year, millions of people fall sick with TB and hundreds of thousands succumb to this preventable and curable disease. The theme of the World TB Day for 2021 - 'The Clock is Ticking' - aptly reflects the fact that there has not been satisfactory progress towards achieving global targets and that we are running out of time in implementing the commitments to end TB, outlined in the UN Political Declaration on Tuberculosis adopted during the first-ever UN High-Level Meeting on Tuberculosis held in 2018. Even though the number of people treated for TB has increased after the UN High-level Meeting in 2018, much remains to be done to reach the global targets. We can achieve these only when we are able to provide equitable access to quality and timely diagnosis, prevention, treatment and care for the disease. Although the past year was devoted to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is heartening that the number of new infections of TB is on the decline, calling for innovative ways to retain the success achieved in its prevention and control in the previous years.

The SAARC region, with an estimated incidence of 3.7 million TB cases, accounts for 37% of the global burden of TB. In this backdrop, the efforts made by the Member States of SAARC for the control of TB in the region, especially since the establishment of the SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) in 1992, are indeed very encouraging. However, there are many challenges, such as multi-drug resistant TB, extensively drug resistant TB, TB in children, Latent TB and TB/HIV co-infection. Moreover, many people in our region continue to suffer from this disease because of poverty, gender inequality, vulnerability, marginalization as well as inadequate access to quality care, including affordable diagnostics and treatment facility.

On this Day, I wish to sincerely request the Member States of SAARC to work collectively with a resolve to achieve the target of eliminating TB in the SAARC region by 2027, three years ahead of the global target. I also take this opportunity to congratulate STAC for consistently supporting the Member States in this endeavour.

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