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To: The opening of the technical session of the 6th Global Conference on Health Promotion, Bangkok, Thailand

Date: Monday, August 8th, 2005

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests and speakers,

On behalf of the World Health Organization, I welcome you to the 6th Global Conference on Health Promotion, and to the start of the technical programme.

I would like to thank and congratulate our co-host, the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand, represented today by my distinguished colleague, Dr Vichai Tienthavorn, for their tremendous efforts to create a wonderful venue and successful event. I look forward to Thai Day and learning more about what our host country is doing in the field of Health Promotion.

Thai Day will, I believe, illustrate well the two themes I would ask you to bear in mind as we go through the coming days together: Community and commitment. In fact, for the next four days, this conference will be a community brought together from all corners of the earth to discuss, share, learn and ultimately, to make a renewed commitment to the concepts and fundamentals of Health Promotion, and to the vitally important document which will take Health Promotion into the 21st century, the Bangkok Charter.

Let us first take a look at this globally inclusive community gathered here, and I hope you take some time over the coming days to do your own discovery of the wealth and breadth of participants: it is quite impressive and gives great hope for the strength and future of Health Promotion.

If you look around, you will see that among us there are representatives from every region of the world. There are participants from international organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society, academic institutions, professional associations, the private sector and government ministries.

This is important, because this community we have gathered here is, by design, a microcosm of the wider community necessary to turn Health Promotion from a compelling idea into a reality that improves people’s health. The fundamental premise of
Health Promotion is that a wide spectrum of actors representing all sectors of society must engage in promoting health if the goal of ‘Health for All’ is to be achieved.

That was the founding principle of the Ottawa Charter, and it is worthwhile to take a moment from our vantage point here in the 21st century to look back to Ottawa in 1986 and remember what a revolutionary idea Health Promotion was then. Today the picture in many parts of the industrialized world is very different and the idea that concerted social, environmental and health approaches produce a much healthier population is quite widely accepted. As a result, we have seen initiatives undertaken to create healthy cities, schools, hospitals and other communities. The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Treaty is a monumental and historic victory for Health Promotion, as is the Global Strategy for Diet, Physical Activity and Health.

So the Ottawa Charter, which has been such a source of guidance and inspiration, must be built upon. We must recognize that not everyone is included in the success story yet, and this is precisely our challenge here in Bangkok. We must look towards the 21st century and ensure Health Promotion is expanded to the wider globe, to enhance and improve the lives of more people in more communities, while nurturing it where it has already taken root. We must address the challenges that have emerged since Ottawa and which lie before us: the health implications of globalization, health inequalities and weak health systems which are challenged by rapidly changing health burdens, most dramatically in the developing world by the rise of chronic diseases and their risk factors. This is, in fact, the goal of the Bangkok Charter, to ‘position health improvements and the reduction of health inequalities at the centre of global and national development agendas.’

The challenge is great. When we leave here having gained new knowledge, learned about successful models and strategies for Health Promotion, the community will have also given its commitment to the Bangkok Charter. Because without the commitment necessary to see it implemented, the Bangkok Charter is no more than a document. This community must expand beyond the walls of this convention centre, to spread the principles and ideas of Health Promotion throughout the many communities, sectors and actors necessary for success. To that end, I am committed to strengthening WHO’s Health Promotion efforts so that we can support the broader Health Promotion community to take the Bangkok Charter forward into the 21st century.
I would like to thank all participants and in particular those who have worked to prepare and present speeches and presentations. It now gives me great pleasure to officially open the technical programme of the 6th Global Conference on Health Promotion, and I wish you well in your endeavours.

Thank you.