Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Thank you Mr Chairman

Y. B. Dato’ Dr. Chua Soi Lek, the Honourable Minister of Health Malaysia

Y.Bhg. Datuk Dr. Hj. Mohd Ismail bin Merican, Director-General of Health Malaysia

Dr. Han Tieru, the WHO Representative for Brunei Darussalam, Singapore and Malaysia

Prof. Dr. Didier Pittet, Leader of the Global Patient Safety Challenge, Geneva

Prof. Seto Wing Hong, Chairman, Asia Pacific Society for Infection Control

Dr. Agnes Leotsakos, World Alliance for Patient Safety, WHO Geneva
Senior MOH officials

Directors of the State Health Departments

Hospital Directors

Yg. Bhg. Dato’-dato’ dan datin-datin

Invited Guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Assalamu’ailaikum wbt and a very good afternoon to you,

Today, we have had the honour and privilege of witnessing a very important event in the history of the MOH, the signing of the country pledge by the Honourable Minister of Health Malaysia. This pledge reaffirms Malaysia’s continuing commitment to support the WHO with special reference to the Global Patient Safety Challenge for 2005 and 2006, which aims to reduce Health care Associated Infections.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are well aware of the importance of preventing and controlling health care acquired infections as a major patient safety goal. Today, we are also fortunate to have had the wonderful opportunity of learning about the latest in healthcare acquired infections and infection control from our distinguished speakers. They are none other than Prof. Didier Pittet from
Geneva who is the leader of the Global Patient Safety Challenge, Prof. Seto Wing Hong from Hong Kong who is currently in Malaysia to conduct the APSIC Infection Control course in collaboration with the MOH and Dr. Agnes Leotsakos of the WHO’s World Alliance for Patient Safety in Geneva. Today, thanks to these learned experts, we have enhanced our knowledge regarding patient safety and the important role played by the control of health care associated infections in the achievement of patient safety. We have learned that for 2005 to 2006, the theme of the Challenge is "Clean Care is Safer Care" with the aim of strengthening the commitment of WHO Member States to address health care-associated infection, which is a major remediable patient safety issue globally. We are now cognisant of the importance of a national programme to combat these infections which can avoid fragmentation and cost inefficient duplication of effort. For 2006, India, Malta, Oman, Pakistan, Russia and Spain are similar planning national events to jump-start or enhance their national programme of preventing and reducing health care-associated infection. Today, with the signing of the country pledge by our Honourable Health Minister, we are delighted to be part of this alliance and will work hard to contribute and share the knowledge gained from participating in this vital patient safety
programme with our learned colleagues from other parts of the globe. We will endeavour to implement the comprehensive guidelines that are present in the WHO Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Healthcare (Advanced Draft). Today, we have come to learn that the implementation of hand hygiene is a vital and cost effective method of minimising the transmission of nosocomial pathogens that are the bane of our patients as well as a challenge to the provision of high quality and safe health care. This knowledge is just as important to us today as when Dr. Ignaz Semmelweiss and Oliver Wendell established in the mid 19th century that infectious agents in hospitals were transmitted through the hands of health care workers and that the chain of transmission could be broken with effective hand hygiene practices.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The Ministry of Health Malaysia is already embarking on a comprehensive strategy to systematically address the issue of healthcare associated infections through a national steering committee headed by the Director-General of Health Malaysia. Nationally, we will aim to make the improved adherence to hand hygiene as a national priority. This will be supported by a well-funded, well coordinated and well implemented programme for the
improvement of hand hygiene as well as other important components of controlling infections such as immunisation and injection safety and blood transfusion safety to name a few. The Medical Programme will also support the strengthening of infection control capacities within healthcare settings in the public and private sectors. With the collaboration of our colleagues from the Public Health Department and the Dental Division as well as the Universities, the Ministry of Defence and the very important private sector, I believe that we can succeed in addressing the issue and challenge posed by these healthcare associated infections.

In addition, the State Directors are expected to review and evaluate the design and implementation of their healthcare-associated infection control programme as well as the effectiveness of their State Infection Control Chairpersons. The Ministry of Health’s Section on Quality in Healthcare will work with the Directors of every State Health Department to develop and implement a strategic plan to reduce health care acquired infections which are based on the WHO Guidelines that have just been discussed by the speakers this afternoon. Particular but not exclusive emphasis will be paid to hand hygiene. The MOH expects that hand hygiene compliance will be regularly monitored and that compliance will increase in the future. The
MOH also expects that infection rates in hospitals will continue to decrease. A number of hand hygiene indicators encompassing structural, process and outcomes aspects will also be developed and monitored by the MOH.

The responsibility of the hospitals especially the Hospital Directors is to ensure that the running of an effective infection control programme is carried out by a dedicated Infection Control Committee which is staffed by competent, qualified staff such as Infection Control Nurses. They will need to engage the clinical and support services, the Medical and Nursing, Housekeeping, Catering, Laundry, Maintenance and Decontamination and sterile services staff, in the control of infection, and provide them with the information necessary to perform all necessary infection control functions.

The Hospital Directors are expected to make the improved adherence to hand hygiene an institutional or hospital-wide priority in the form of appropriate leadership, administrative support and financial resources. They should provide their staff with access to the necessary facilities to perform hand washing and hand rub including the procurement of the appropriate alcohol-based hand rub. These alcohol-based hand rub must be available either at the point of patient care or are carried by health care personnel as they go about their daily duties. An excellent guide to the
choice of the appropriate hand rub solutions can be found in the WHO Guidelines, which should be regularly referred to as current evidence for effective infection control practices. I would like to quote one example from this Guidelines which recommend that alcohol based hand gels should not be use unless they can be proven to meet the European standard EN 1500. We should also appreciate the fact that suitable “contact time” is needed to enable the disinfection of hands by alcohol-based hand rubs. This important fact must be appreciated or else what we think as “clean hands” may not actually be so.

Hospital Directors and staff in hospitals are also advised to regularly access the WHO website to obtain further details and updates of information concerning the prevention and control of healthcare associated infections. They should identify and assign the appropriate healthcare personnel to undergo awareness and training programmes for institutional infection control activities, including the implementation of a hand hygiene promotional programme. They will have solid the backing and support of the Section on Quality in Health in this endeavour.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
On behalf of the Ministry of Health, I would like to sincerely thank the World Health Organisation headquarters in Geneva for having provided their solid support in making this event a success. I am confident that the Ministry of Health will succeed in attaining the goal of successfully preventing and eradicating healthcare associated infections, be they in the public or the private sector. I would thus like to invite all the stakeholders of our healthcare system to collaborate closely in the spirit of sharing and partnership to combat and eradicate this global patient safety problem. I wish to also thank Professor Didier Pittet and Professor Seto for their invaluable contribution to Malaysia’s efforts. They have done much commendable work in the area of infection control and it is through their work and their colleagues who have come together to develop the WHO Guidelines on Hand washing that we are able to move forward and build on their work. As Sir Isaac Newton once said, “we are able to see much further only because we are standing on the shoulders of giants”.

Thank you.