Thank you very much for your attendance at this special public lecture organized by the Japan Medical Association.

This public lecture has been sponsored by the World Medical Association (WMA), an international organization with membership comprising 85 medical associations throughout the world; the Japan Medical Association (JMA) has participated in various WMA activities over 50 years since it joined the WMA in 1951. The JMA and WMA are jointly hosting the “Caring Physicians of the World 1st WMA Asian-Pacific Regional Conference”, which is being held today and tomorrow in Tokyo. This regional conference is bringing together approximately 50 representatives of medical associations from countries throughout the Asian-Pacific region to discuss two main themes: responses to earthquakes, tsunamis, and other natural disasters that have been occurring with frequency in the region in recent years; and the problem of large-scale outbreaks of infectious disease which follow natural disasters.

To coincide with this timely conference, the JMA also planned a public lecture on the same themes for members of the general public and personnel in charge of emergency care and disease prevention in Japan. Highly valuing the relevance of such a public lecture, the WMA has done us the great honor of lending their name to the lecture as a sponsor. I would therefore ask the WMA President and Chair of the Council to say a few words also.

Natural disasters and infectious diseases are problems that reach beyond race, religion, and national boundaries. They are an extremely serious problem that humans must strive together to overcome. As the media has reported, there is a vital need for the general public and above all the medical profession to be well prepared in its daily activities for natural disasters and outbreaks of infectious disease; this lecture presents an excellent opportunity for considering possible responses to these problems.

It is my sincere hope that as part of the continuous efforts of the JMA, this public lecture and regional conference will jointly provide the general public and health professionals with an opportunity to further enhance awareness regarding disaster preparedness.

President, Japan Medical Association (Japan)
here to ensure that we are better prepared at all times to deal with disasters and epidemics as a collective because of the interconnectedness of the globe.

As we know viruses do not require visas and the speed with which they travel because of air travel requires us to cooperate willingly and fully so that we can protect one another and effectively curb the spread of pandemics.

Cooperation between civil societies, NGO’s like the National Medical Associations (NMAs), Red Cross etc, and Government are an essential pre-requisite of preparedness. Strategies to be employed need to be rehearsed periodically like we do fire drills to ensure that the possible shortcomings are addressed in advance. Proper co-operative structures need to be in place to avoid confusion and maximize efficiency.

We must remember that we can never be too prepared for these situations on the contrary we may be under prepared. Times like these require good social leadership and I am grateful to be a part of the WMA and have the opportunity to interact with the Japan Medical Association and other NMAs for working together to overcome difficulties.

I thank all of you for the services you offer to mankind particularly in critical times of need, for no compensation or remuneration where often the only reward is a simple thank you and eternal gratitude, and not infrequently that is the encouragement we need to continue doing good.

Let us use this opportunity to learn from each other, interact meaningfully and forge partnerships that recognize what each and every one of us and all sectors bring to the table for our collective common good. We need each other now more than ever before.

Thank you for attending, thank you for the invitation and most importantly for continuing to serve humanity.

President, World Medical Association (South Africa)

Yoram BLACHAR

Thank you very much for inviting me to attend this important lecture about disaster preparedness and infectious diseases. It is an honor to be here in Japan and to address this very significant topic from the standpoint of the medical profession.

Although health is not an obvious component of disaster prevention, the effects of recurrent small scale disasters in a community can have severe effects on health. The absence of pre-planned coordination mechanisms, analysis and prevention in times of such natural disasters can greatly contribute to the spread of infectious diseases. Environmental conditions arising after natural disasters, such as the earthquakes and tsunamis that have recently affected South Asia with greater frequency, increase the risk of the outbreak of infectious diseases. This is especially true when water supplies and sewage systems have been disrupted. Airborne, waterborne and foodborne diseases such as diarrhea, dysentery, and cholera can occur for up to one month after a disaster. Crowding and unsanitary conditions in evacuation centers can amplify the transmission of infectious diseases. Evacuation centers should therefore be prepared for considerable demands on clinic staff, janitorial services, and the maintenance of personal hygiene.

In addition, when extensive flooding occurs, water and food supplies can become contaminated. This can have a secondary effect of worsening illnesses that already exist in the affected region, and increase the risk of exposure to waterborne agents such as mosquitoes. Clean drinking water, food, shelter and medical care for
injuries are of primary importance immediately after a disaster.

Because the effects of a disaster can last a long time, affected regions will need financial and material assistance for many months following a disaster. Such assistance should come in the form of surveying and monitoring for infectious and water- or insect-transmitted diseases; diverting medical supplies from non-affected areas to meet the needs of the affected regions; and restoring normal primary health services, water systems, housing and employment, among other things.

Medical professionals have a great part to play in assuring that natural disasters do not result in even worse health disasters. An essential part of any disaster preparedness program must therefore take into account the health repercussions of such an event and prepare medical and non-medical personnel and infrastructure. This is why a discussion of the sort taking place today is so vitally important. The meeting of representatives from different parts of the Asian region allows us to network, share ideas and experience and together come up with ways to prevent and react to the health repercussions of natural disasters. We have seen the effectiveness of such teamwork in dealing with SARS, avian flu and, indeed, several of the natural disasters that have occurred in the past few years. It is my hope that many positive ideas will result from this meeting, and I am honored to be a part of it. Thank you.

Chair of Council, World Medical Association (Israel)