26 January-GENEVA - The WHO Executive Board, currently holding its 144th session in Geneva, has appointed Dr Takeshi Kasai as Regional Director for WHO's Western Pacific Region, and re-appointed Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh for a second term as Regional Director for WHO's Southeast Asia Region.

New Regional Director for Western Pacific (WPRO)

"I am grateful for the trust placed in me by WHO Member States and deeply honoured to serve as Regional Director for the Western Pacific," said Dr Kasai. He underscored the importance of making WHO even more responsive to countries' needs at a time when rapid economic, environmental and social changes are affecting the lives and health of the Region's nearly 1.9 billion people."

Dr Kasai said he plans to build on the decade of leadership and legacy of the outgoing Regional Director Dr Shin Young-soo: "For more than 7 decades, countries have counted on WHO to work with them to solve a variety of public health challenges. My predecessor, Dr Shin Young-soo, transformed WHO in this region, making it more people-centred and country-oriented. We must continue to evolve as an organization – building on past accomplishments while being closely attuned to new realities on the ground."

Dr Kasai, a Japanese national, has worked for WHO for more than 15 years. As Director of Programme Management for the last 4 years, he served as deputy to the Regional Director. He takes office as Regional Director on 1 February.

Prior to this, Dr Kasai was instrumental in developing and implementing the Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies, which guides Member States to improve readiness and response in public health emergencies. Dr Kasai also served as the WHO Representative in Viet Nam from 2012 to 2014.

A physician by training, his career in public health began nearly 30 years ago, when he was assigned to a post on the remote northeast coast of Japan, where he saw first-hand the value of building strong health systems from the ground up.

Re-election of the Regional Director for South-East Asia (SEARO)

"It is a privilege to once again be appointed as Regional Director for WHO South-East Asia Region. The confidence you have reposed in me is humbling," said Dr Khetrapal Singh, whose first term as Regional Director was marked by numerous initiatives and public health achievements.

Outlining her vision for the second term that begins on 1 February 2019, Dr Khetrapal Singh said: "Sustaining the gains, accelerating progress to finish the unfinished agenda and innovating, would be the approach to ensure health and wellbeing of the 1.8 billion people across the Region."

In her first term, Dr Khetrapal Singh has been focusing on building an increasingly responsive and accountable WHO in the Region, while prioritizing persisting and emerging epidemiological and demographic challenges; promoting universal health coverage and building robust health systems; strengthening emergency risk management and articulating a strong regional voice in the global health agenda.

Dr Khetrapal Singh, an Indian national, is the first woman Regional Director of WHO South-East Asia, and assumed office on 1 February 2014. On 5 September 2018, she was unanimously nominated by for a second 5-year term.

Dr Khetrapal Singh has a long and distinguished career in public health. She has served as a civil servant in India, as Executive Director of Sustainable Development and Healthy Environments at World Health Organization's headquarters, with the World Bank on Monitoring Health Population and Nutrition and for over a decade as Deputy Regional Director of WHO South-East Asia.