***Opening remarks by Ms* *Pratibha Mehta, UN RC in Viet Nam at the first quarterly HPG meeting of 2016***

*17 March 2016*

*Associate Prof. Nguyen Thi Kim Tien, Minister of Health, Socialist Republic of Viet Nam,*

*Professor Le Quang Cuong, Vice Minister of Health, Socialist Republic of Viet Nam,*

*Ms Victoria Kwakwa, Country Director of the World Bank, Socialist Republic of Viet Nam,*

*Ministry Representatives, Representatives of Provincial Departments of Health, Development Partners in attendance,*

*Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen;*

I am honored to co-chair this first Health Partnership Group Meeting for 2016 alongside Minister Tien and Victoria Kwakwa, Country Director of the World Bank. This important meeting will offer us an opportunity to collectively acknowledge and review the health sector’s contribution to Viet Nam’s development over the past five years, and to once again hear and affirm our support to the Ministry of Health’s vision for the coming five years.

Viet Nam worked extremely hard towards the attainment of the MDGs by the end of 2015. The achievements the country made are substantial, such as: meeting the targets for the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, universal primary education, and the promotion of gender equality in education. It was also considered one of 10 fast-track countries in the attainment of the health-related MDGs, successfully reducing maternal mortality and child mortality and meeting its targets for controlling malaria and tuberculosis and combating HIV/AIDS.

Viet Nam should be proud of these achievements, yet it must remain conscious of two things: 1) that these gains must be sustained; and 2) the unfinished and urgent MDG agenda remains to be tackled. These two issues must be taken forward as the country prepares to tackle the new agenda under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The time is now opportune to carry both the MDGs and the SDGs forward – as the country is rolling out or in the process of developing its vision, plans and strategies for the next five years, including among others the Five-Year Health Sector Plan (2016-2020) recently approved by the Minister of Health, the Socioeconomic Development Plan (SEDP) for 2016-2020 close to completion, and the UN’s One-Plan for the period 2017-2021. We hope that today’s meeting will herald in our new ambition to incorporate the post-2015 health agenda into these development plans.

The SDGs reflect an approach that is universal and equitable; targeting people, the planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. Health is at the core of each of these five “Ps”. This is because 75% of health outcomes are dependent on living and working conditions, and good health is a precondition for, as well as an outcome of growth and sustainable development. Although there is only one goal dedicated solely to health – that is Goal 3 “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages” – almost all 17 goals are directly related or indirectly contribute to health as a determinant, outcome and indicator of sustainable development.

The SDGs accommodate and respond to the fast-evolving context of Viet Nam as a lower middle-income country undergoing continuous and rapid development. They also acknowledge the challenges the country is facing, including the enormous pressure that is being put on the health sector by the rapidly rising burden of NCDs, the ageing of the population, and the increasing inequities alongside the increasing demand and expectations of the population for health.

In the midst of these challenges, we are also seeing a shift in the modalities of development cooperation. Traditional forms of financial support for the country’s development are declining and health is one of the most affected sectors. As a result, Viet Nam will face serious challenges in ensuring the sustainability of health interventions, and prioritization will be a painful process. However, we can surmount this if we commit to work together. More than ever, effective development cooperation (in health and across all sectors) is needed. We must ensure that the Government and its partners deliver on our collective responsibility to ensure maximum effectiveness in the use of the technical and financial resources available for development in general and for health in particular.

The UN in Viet Nam is committed to supporting Viet Nam as it continues to aspire for the fulfillment of its goals and the development of its people. We will endeavor to be agile and responsive to this evolving context and ensure that our support and interventions are relevant to the country’s needs. WHO, along with other UN agencies in health will combine their individual expertise to formulate and implement a One UN response to the country’s need in health.

In closing I would like to once again congratulate and thank the MOH, especially Minister Tien, who along with the development partners in the HPG has successfully steered the country’s vision to ensuring the good health and well-being of its people. We will continue to look forward to a stronger, healthier and more effective collaboration in 2016 and beyond.