



**Statement to the 71 WHO Regional Committee for Western Pacific  
Provisional Agenda item 13. Safe and affordable surgery,  
On Behalf of Public Services International**

Distinguished chair, honourable delegates, thank you for the opportunity to address the seventy first Regional Council of the World Health Organisation Western Pacific Region.

I will speak to *agenda item 13. Safe and affordable surgery*, on behalf of *Public Services International*. My name is Basil Adora and I am a general surgeon and an office bearer of the Vanuatu Association of Public Service Employees in Vanuatu.

- We welcome the attention to the lack access to safe and affordable surgery in the Western Pacific Region. Vanuatu has had more than its fair change of challenges to safe surgery like many other Pacific islands countries, and we have published peer reviewed articles looking at this exact problem.
- We strongly believe that a key elements required to deliver safe and affordable surgery is to strengthen public health facilities' capacity to provide surgery and we are concerned that this point is not central to the *draft Action Framework for Safe and Affordable Surgery in the Western Pacific Region (2021–2030)* that is proposed for endorsement.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the need to strengthen public sector-led health systems. Countries that have relied on private health system had worse outcomes and lapses in infection prevention and control practices were more in under-regulated private facilities. Infection prevention and control and hygiene are essential to avoid lapses in patient safety, which is an essential component of safe surgery.
- Public health facilities have a better spacial distribution than private ones, and can therefore ensure accessibility to a larger population. In order to ensure timely care, governments need to invest in making more public facilities surgically capable, and equipped based on the WHO Generic Essential Emergency Equipment List.
- Surgical workforces need to be built in the public sector. Surgical, anaesthetic, and obstetrician physician workforce density remains low in many western pacific island countries, including in Vanuatu where i am from. At the moment we have only one trainee from Fiji in the regional program, and no national programs for training. This means higher costs for trainees.
- The insurance-based coverage model has shown its limitations in removing economic barriers to accessing safe surgery. In the medium-term, it is more cost-effective for governments to invest in the capacity to provide surgery in the public sector instead of increasing public funding allocations to cover the costs of providing surgery services in the private sector.

Public sector oriented policies are essential to build surgical capacity and facilitate provision of safe, timely, and affordable surgical care. Surgery must become a public health priority in the Western Pacific region.

Thank you.