SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

The Fourth International Social Security Association (ISSA) Meeting of Directors of Social Security Organizations in Asia and Pacific was held in Seoul from 9 to 11 November 2005 and was organized in cooperation with the National Health Insurance Corporation of the Republic of Korea. The Meeting was attended by 131 participants from 29 countries. Also at the Meeting were representatives from the International Association of Pension and Social Funds (IAPSF), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The theme of the 2005 Meeting of Directors was Innovation: The key to social security progress. Current challenges in delivering social security health insurance; developments in public old-age benefit schemes; new approaches to extending social security coverage; and implementing social security information and communication technology (ICT) databases were the four agenda topics examined during the Meeting.

Opening session

The opening session of the Meeting was addressed by Mr. Lee, Seung Jae President of the National Health Insurance Corporation (NHIC) of Korea, Mr. Song, Jae Sung, the Honorable Vice-Minister of the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare, Mrs. Corazon de la Paz, the ISSA President, and Mr. Alejandro Bonilla-Garcia, the Acting Secretary General of the ISSA.

In his message, Mr. Lee, Seung Jae stated that this Fourth Meeting of Directors offered a valuable forum for sharing not only success stories but exchanging diverse and significant experiences of social security organizations from different countries in the Asia and Pacific region. The achievements of the NHIC, with universal coverage attained within 12 years, have made it a model case study for neighboring countries. Nonetheless, he said the NHIC is dedicating greater efforts to reforming the system, an example of which is the reduction in the patient’s burden for high-cost treatment of ailments like cancer. It is expected that within the next two to three years, Korea’s national health insurance will advance to the ranks of the developed European countries.

The Honorable Vice-Minister, Mr. Song, Jae Sung, welcomed the participants on the occasion of the Fourth Meeting of Directors organized by the ISSA in conjunction with the host, the NHIC of Korea. He noted that the remarkable advances Korea has achieved in every field of social security was greatly aided by its continued economic growth, the
higher expectations of the Korean people, the development of information technology and the government’s steadfast determination and consistent perusal of policy aimed at enhancing the welfare of its citizens. However, because of the numerous problems the world continues to face, such as food shortage and diseases such as AIDS, he said that greater interest and support should be given to expanding social security systems, especially in the developing and underdeveloped countries in Asia and Africa.

The ISSA President, Mrs. de la Paz conveyed the greetings of the newly-elected ISSA Secretary General, Mr. Hans-Horst Konkolewsky. On behalf of the ISSA, she expressed gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Korea and the NHIC for hosting the event, and the hardworking National Organizing Committee for the excellent arrangements provided. She noted that the theme of the 2005 Meeting of Directors, *Innovation: The key to social security progress* and the agenda for the Meeting have been formulated with a view to examining new developments in the region in major branches such as health insurance and pensions, and in the operational field of information and communication technology (ICT), and the important challenge of extending coverage. She thanked the ISSA member organizations, the OECD, the WHO, the ILO, IBM and SMART Communications, for their technical contributions to the Meeting.

Mr. Bonilla-García, the Acting Secretary General of the ISSA, noted the importance of innovative approaches to social security protection especially at a time when six out of ten new jobs created are in the informal economy. The growth of the informal economy and the persistence of rural conditions in many developing countries heighten the challenge to extend social security coverage. He said that one of the effects of globalization is the increase in the movement of labour across national borders such that a worker can go through life with contingencies taking place in different parts of the world. He also touched on the importance of improving the gender aspect of social security coverage, stressing the important contribution of women in the economy. He then provided introductory comments on each of the agenda topics and highlighted some of the main issues to be considered during the discussions.

**Keynote address**

In his keynote address, Mr. Peter Whiteford, Principal Administrator of the Social Policy Division, Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs of the OECD provided an overall perspective on the four main agenda topics of the Meeting of Directors. On *Current challenges in delivering social security health insurance*, he noted that people in rich countries get 40 times as much in health care spending as people in poor countries, with developing countries bearing roughly 93 per cent of the total global disease burden, nearly half of which is due to communicable diseases. Policies that prevent the spread of communicable diseases are more in the arena of direct public provision through for instance immunization and clean water, rather than health insurance. Nonetheless, there are strong arguments for expanding coverage because of the negative externalities of poor health coverage in a globalizing world, e.g., SARS. He referred to the country experiences of Japan, Korea, Mongolia and Thailand as being instructive in extending health care coverage.

On *Developments in public old-age benefit schemes*, Mr. Whiteford stressed the need for multiple policy responses to meet the challenges of population ageing, with pension and benefit reform as only one part of the response. Slower labour force growth can be offset by increases in labour productivity or labour force participation and employment, including those of older workers, mothers, people with disabilities,
unemployed persons and welfare recipients. Strengthening of skills, addressing employer practices and discrimination, and immigration policy can also be part of the solution. Guaranteed minimum income support is important, and complexity should be avoided. Ending early retirement schemes is of central importance, with flexibility in choice of retirement age desirable, subject to actuarially neutral decrements for early retirement and increments for later retirement. There is also a need to monitor and control disability benefits.

On New approaches to extending social security coverage, Mr. Whiteford identified the uncovered groups as the informal and casual workers, persons employed in agriculture, migrant workers, women and home-based workers, and minority groups. Coverage can be a problem if the contributory principle is used, implying that general revenue financed schemes can be part of a potential solution. A number of alternative options to expand coverage include strengthening economic development to empower poor people to participate in contributory schemes, modifying the contribution requirement for women so that periods of caring for children and older dependent relatives are recognized for contribution purposes, for government to make explicit co-contributions for target groups, and to promote the role of non-governmental organizations to organize some form of coverage.

On Implementing social security information and communication technology (ICT) databases, Mr. Whiteford recognized the importance of ICT as the foundation of successful policy implementation. ICT offers considerable potential to support solutions to problems of social exclusion. Examples of innovative use of technology include information sharing, community support websites, online calculations of benefit entitlements, and alerts and advice sent by mobile phone. Telephones, particularly mobile phones, community ICT access, advisers and intermediaries all form part of a “multi-channel” approach of delivering social security services.

In the discussions that followed, questions were raised on whether there was a set of standards that would facilitate the use of common protocols, thereby increasing efficiency in handling and sharing data. The role of government in extending coverage was also highlighted, noting that there are social economic costs of non-coverage. The issue of whether pension systems of public and private sectors should be unified would depend on what the country views as optimal given the existing structures. There is a need to look for the best mix taking into account the country’s specific circumstances. Questions were raised on the extent to which private pension schemes would help in improving the adequacy of benefits. The Latin American experience shows that private pension schemes are not immune to devaluations of prices. Individual, private accounts are subject to market risks.

ISSA address

The chair for this session was Mr. Soliman Al-Humayyd, Governor, General Organization for Social Insurance of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In his address, Mr. Bonilla-García, the Acting Secretary General of the ISSA, emphasized the importance of social security in dealing with not just the risks that an individual, a community, a country, a region or the world may be exposed to, but also in dealing with the certainties in life that occur between birth and death, such as the need for food, health, shelter, education, work and training. The combination of risks and certainties that an individual faces defines his/her vulnerability. As events impinge on the life cycle of the individual, the level of vulnerability may increase or diminish. By allowing
access to essential goods and services, promoting chances, opportunities and potentials, and facilitating the adoption of preventive and protective measures, social security is thereby able to reduce vulnerabilities and help maintain these at low levels. Taken in this context, social security is clearly an investment in the life cycle continuum.

The discussions raised the following major issues. Recognizing the importance of social security in dealing with risks and its contribution to economic development, coverage becomes all the more imperative. However, coverage cannot be extended overnight but can happen only gradually, provided support is provided on a sustained basis. Public schemes play a significant role in improving and extending social security coverage. Redistribution and solidarity can be achieved only through a public mechanism. Health coverage is a major concern because health problems can push families into poverty. In some Latin American countries, the out-of-pocket expenses for health by the poor are even greater than the budget of the Health Ministries. The family support system continues to be important, especially in developing countries, given that coverage under formal systems is limited. Nonetheless, poor countries cannot afford not to have social security because the costs imposed on society would be in terms of underdevelopment and unemployment. The challenge is to develop better partnerships so that the issues confronting social security may be brought out of social security circles to the attention of national decision-makers. Equally important is the need to extend the message that social security makes not just social sense but economic sense as well. Innovation, reengineering and restructuring of social security will enable social security institutions to be ahead of problems and prepare for the future.

Current challenges in delivering social security health insurance

The Chair for this agenda item was Mr. Ramesh Inder Singh, Director General, Employees' State Insurance Corporation of India.

Mr. Dorjsuren Bayarsaikhan, Regional Adviser in Health Care Financing of the WHO Regional Office for Western Pacific, presented an overview on this topic. Three reports on their respective country experiences were presented by Mr. Farhad Zargari, Advisor to the Chief Executive Officer and General Director, International Affairs Department of the Social Security Organization (SSO) of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of Mr. Gholamreza S. Amiri, Chairman of the Board and Managing Director, Professor Minah Kang Kim of the Department of Public Administration of the College of Sciences at Ewha Womans University of the Republic of Korea, and Mr. Papalii Panoa Tavita Moala, Chief Executive Officer of the Samoa National Provident Fund (SNPF).

Mr. Bayarsaikhan’s report noted the increasing interest in social health insurance as a means to more equitable and greater coverage and access to health services. Regional experiences show that even for low-income countries, social health insurance is feasible provided there is policy consensus, political commitment and funding support for the poor and vulnerable. It is possible to develop social health insurance schemes for the formal and informal sectors of the population through a national approach, or through a parallel approach that promotes compulsory social security schemes for the salaried population and community-based health insurance schemes for the rest of the population. However, governments’ formal commitment to support the poor and other vulnerable populations is critically important to ensure coverage under such schemes. Regional experience and pilot projects also show that provider payment methods such as capitation and case mix payments have some positive impacts on extension of coverage versus fee-for-service methods.
Mr. Zargari presented the country experience of the Islamic Republic of Iran in delivering social security health insurance. The SSO counts among its main achievements the full geographic coverage and comprehensive services it is able to extend through its Direct Health Network (DHN) and Indirect Health Network (IHN), the continuous improvement and promotion of quality through its “Total Quality Management” system for its DHN, and the use in its DHN of modern therapeutic services including the shift from traditional to non-invasive medical treatment and medical equipment calibration plan. The SSO also intends to move towards e-health through the electronic management of health care services. The major challenges confronting the SSO are the steep increases in health care costs, averaging about 32 per cent in the last five years, the absence of a referral system, the absence of a requisite medical culture in society, population ageing, and political pressure to reduce the contribution rate, currently at 30 per cent of a worker’s monthly salary.

Professor Kim reported on the opportunities and challenges facing the Korean health insurance system. Korea’s implementation of the National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme has considerably improved access to medical facilities. However, there is persistent demand for a stronger insurance protection because of patients’ high co-payments and limited service coverage. To respond to these challenges, the Korean Government in July 2000, unified all multiple autonomous insurance societies into a single insurer, and the functions of prescribing and dispensing drugs were separated and specialized between doctors and pharmacists. A series of programmes was recently announced that would expand benefit coverage, lower and control consumer payments, and provide special coverage for catastrophic illnesses. Efforts to strengthen the NHI include an increase in government subsidy and co-payment, more thorough anti-fraud mechanisms, improvements in income assessment for the self-employed, and an annual increase in the contribution rate until 2006. Pilot programmes of a prospective payment system using Diagnostic Related Groups (DRGs) show promising results in lowering medical expenses per patient vis-à-vis fee-for-service payment. Another payment option being considered is a global budgeting system that would control both the quantity and price of health care service provision. A new social insurance scheme for long-term care is under study, for implementation in 2008.

Mr. Moala presented the Members’ Health Savings and Insurance Scheme of the SNPF. The scheme was a specific response to the SNPF members’ expression of need for additional savings for health care. The government has a National Health Scheme that is funded by general tax revenues and guarantees all Samoans access to public inpatient and outpatient care, and overseas care when the required treatment cannot be provided in Samoa. The SNPF health care scheme will complement - not replace - the government scheme, with the contributions of each member to cover the member’s cost of participation and those of the member’s dependants (the Medisave premium), and will also pay for the patient’s co-payments for inpatient care. Contributions not used for these two purposes will accumulate in the member’s Medisave account and earn dividends at the same rate earned by the member’s SNPF account. A Cabinet Implementation Subcommittee has been tasked to draw up the implementing rules and regulations for the SNPF health care scheme.

There was keen interest on how Korea achieved universal coverage in health insurance in just 12 years. The approach adopted by the NHIC was the incremental approach, which essentially identified and phased the coverage of target groups. Underlying the incremental approach was the strong political commitment and leadership of the Korean Government. There was discussion on how health care costs may rise, e.g., unnecessary health service, due to improper incentives introduced by available payment mechanisms. Other issues raised were related to the use of information
technology, electronic services, and other control measures to contain health expenses, track irregularities and contain fraud.

**Developments in public old-age benefit schemes**

The Chair for this session was Mr. Olota Tulumani Rokovunisei, General Manager and Chief Executive of the Fiji National Provident Fund.

Two reports were presented under this topic, by Ms. Maribel D. Ortiz, Director of the ISSA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, and by Mr. Yan, Zhongxang, Division Chief, Social Insurance Administration who reported on behalf of Mr. Pi, Dehai, Deputy Director General of the Social Insurance Administration of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MOLSS) of the People’s Republic of China.

Ms. Ortiz presented the results of an August 2005 ISSA survey on developments in public old-age benefit schemes in the Asia and Pacific region. With the exception perhaps of the four OECD countries in the region, short-term financial pressures on pension schemes arise more from programme generosity rather than population ageing. The trend of reform is thus towards the use of conventional measures such as increasing the contribution rate, raising the retirement age, tightening benefit conditions, and improving investment performance. With income security in old age as the overarching purpose of public old-age pension systems, Ms. Ortiz said that there should be periodic assessments of the coverage provided vis-à-vis its adequacy, affordability, and sustainability to meet the population’s retirement needs, noting however that there are inherent trade-offs in these operational goals. It is not just a question of finding the right balance between affordability and adequacy; but also of being able to maintain that balance into the future. Another key point is to view pension reform in the context of the larger effort of integrating social protection policies with labour market policies, including population and migration policies, with the end in view of helping increase employment, productivity and economic growth. These would allow societies to strengthen and provide affordable, adequate and sustainable support for the needs of their aged members.

Mr. Yan reported on China’s old-age social insurance scheme. Over the past 20 years, a number of important achievements have been accomplished. Ten years ago, China replaced the pay-as-you-go system of financing the basic old-age social insurance scheme with a partial funding system that combines social pooling with individual accounts. Coverage in the basic old-age social insurance scheme now includes all workers in urban enterprises, the self-employed and people in flexible employment, with the cost of contributions shared by the state, the employing unit and the individual worker. The establishment of the MOLSS in March 1998 aims to streamline social security management. Among the serious challenges faced by China are the ageing of its population; the rapid rate of urbanization; and the changing employment patterns that veer towards the non-public sector and other flexible employment, which are yet to be covered by the old-age social insurance scheme. To respond to these challenges, various measures are under study, including the injection of funds into individual accounts; broadening investment channels to preserve and increase the value of the funds; expanding coverage; improving the formula for the basic old-age pension; strengthening fund regulation by raising the pooling level; improving the multi-pillar old-age insurance system; reforming the old-age insurance system for state organs and institutions; and strengthening the legal and regulatory framework for old-age insurance and social security.
There was general agreement in the discussions that ISSA member organizations found useful the cross-country information which was generated by the August 2005 survey conducted by the ISSA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. There was keen interest on the findings on the actuarial life of the funds of those member organizations that responded, and the similarity of reform efforts being pursued. The balance equation consisting of revenues obtained from contributions and investment earnings vis-à-vis expenditures arising from benefit payments and operating expenses provided a framework for the reform efforts being pursued, which essentially consisted of policies and measures to increase contributions, improve investment performance, control or diminish benefits and operating expenses.

**New approaches to extending social security coverage**

The Chair for this agenda item was Mr. Wim Franssen, ISSA Treasurer and Director, International and Foreign Affairs, Social Insurance Bank of the Netherlands.

Three reports were discussed for this topic, by Ms. Nihaya Elayyan, Technical Adviser of the ISSA Subregional Office for Arab Countries in Asia, by Mr. Hiroshi Yamabana, Senior Social Security Specialist of the ILO Subregional Office for East Asia, and by Mr. Napoleon Nazareno, President and Chief Executive Officer of SMART Communications, Inc. of the Philippines.

Ms. Elayyan reported on the current efforts of Arab countries in Asia to extend social security coverage. Old-age, disability and survivors’ insurance are the most commonly provided, with insurance against work injuries and occupational diseases ranking second in implementation. Benefits are in the form of pensions subject to qualifying conditions, with the exception of Lebanon where lump-sum compensation is provided. Draft legislation is under consideration to shift benefits to pensions. In general, social security schemes in Arab countries target mainly the wage- and salaried-workers on a mandatory basis. Extension of coverage to other workers is a gradual but continuing effort. In varying degrees, the covered categories now include the public sector (civil and military), the private sector, employees with previous compulsory coverage, certain target groups (such as the self-employed, artisans, freelancers, employers and taxi drivers), and expatriates from the member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. However, informal and agricultural workers, domestic servants, casual workers and migrants are still excluded from coverage. Among the recent innovations is the portability of benefit rights. In order to facilitate movement of Saudi employees between the public and private sectors, a special system allows the portability of benefits from one pension scheme to another.

Mr. Yamabana discussed four ways to extend coverage, namely, by extending existing social insurance schemes; by encouraging micro-insurance schemes; by introducing universal benefits financed from general tax revenues; or by creating means-tested benefits, also financed from general tax revenues. The appropriate mix of the different mechanisms to extend coverage would depend on the national strategy adopted. In Asian developing economies with large informal sectors, the key issues in designing schemes are related to coverage, the benefit structure, the funding mechanism, and administration of the scheme. Mr. Yamabana noted that in Thailand, prior to the Social Security Act of 1990 which established the Social Security Office (SSO), there was no social security provision for private formal economy workers other than the 1972 Workmen’s Compensation Fund. SSO originally applied to workers in establishments with 20 or more workers, and now covers the smallest of enterprises. In October 2001, Thailand introduced the Universal Health Care Scheme or the 30-Baht scheme, which is
financed from general tax revenues except for a nominal co-payment of 30 baht per patient’s visit. In Lao PDR, the Social Security Office started operations in 2001, covering 25,000 workers and dependents by 2003, or about 30 percent of the target population of private wage earners. In Cambodia, except for direct cash payments of mainly retirement pensions to civil servants, there is as yet no social security mechanism.

Mr. Nazareno discussed the potentials of using mobile commerce services (m-commerce) for social security administration. Using short messaging service (SMS) as a platform, a mobile phone company in the Philippines was able to develop a wide array of value-added services for its clients, including the transfer of funds from the individual’s bank account using a mobile phone. To ensure that the money flows generated by m-commerce are handled properly, the m-commerce platform is protected by very robust security features such as multi-factor authentication and triple DES encryption systems. These are compliant with the standards set by the American National Standards Institute for electronic transactions. The technology has been thoroughly examined and certified by the Philippine Central Bank and is fully compliant with anti-money laundering laws and regulations. M-commerce innovations can give social security organizations the leeway to develop products and services that are more flexible and better suited to the cash positions of lower income households. The possibility of developing social security contributions or health care premiums in “sachets” should be looked into. Allowing individuals to make smaller but more frequent payments may help address the needs of people who cannot afford one-time payments.

The importance of social solidarity was emphasized in the discussions that followed the extension of coverage to excluded groups. In designing insurance schemes for the informal sector, extending coverage on a voluntary basis would make the scheme prone to the problem of adverse selection, whereby individuals who are most likely to experience the contingency would avail of membership. A number of participants expressed interest on the potential of mobile phones in social security administration. SMS is in fact already being used, at least in Australia and in the Philippines, to transmit information regarding member accounts. Questions were raised on the compatibility of mobile phones with the existing ICT infrastructure of social security organizations.

Implementing social security information and communication technology (ICT) databases

The Chair for this agenda item was Mr. Azlan Zainol, Chief Executive Officer, Employees Provident Fund of Malaysia.

There were three reports presented on this topic, by Mr. Roger Barsons, Group Manager, Corporate Support on behalf of Mr. Jeff Harmer, Secretary of the Department of Family and Community Services of Australia, Mr. Brian Lee-Archer, Pensions Executive Consultant of the IBM Global Social Segment in Asia-Pacific, and Mr. Ahmed Al-Omran, Director General of Infrastructure of the GOSI, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Barson described the evolution of data storage and processing to support social security policy in Australia, from 1945 to 2020. The paper divides the highlights of the past 60 years and the next 15 years into four generations: the post-war or pre-computer period (mid-Forties to mid-Sixties); the period of rapid social change corresponding to the first generation of computer systems (early Sixties to early Eighties); the period when there was a very rapid change in the make-up of the workforce corresponding to the information revolution (early Eighties to late Nineties); and the revolution in personal services corresponding to the connected society (first two decades
of the 21st century). The report notes that the first half of each computer generation involves experimentation, learning what can be achieved, and some early successes leading to a realization of the significance that changes can bring. The second half perfects what was learned in the first half, and the real benefits are realized before the technology, and accompanying technologists, age into obscurity and a new wave of inventors brings the world into the next generation. Over half a century of development in information and communication technology (ICT) shows that the unimaginable becomes the deployed solution, and that ease of front end usage comes with increased complexity of delivery and support.

Mr. Lee-Archer underscored the importance of comprehensive client databases in the administration of social security, and focused on one of the most important decisions when making an ICT investment for the automation of business processes, namely, the software sourcing method and development approach to automate social security business processes. He identified four distinct approaches, each with advantages and disadvantages, and noted that there were many factors that influence the decision on what is the right approach for a particular situation. The four approaches are: custom development, transfer, packages or commercial off-the-shelf, and industry frameworks. Mr. Lee-Archer emphasized that the challenge for social security organizations is to ensure that business drives technology-based decisions, and is unconstrained by previous technology decisions and development approaches. The introduction of ICT in social security organizations should be an integral part of a strategic business plan. He discussed how the method of component-based analysis can be used to identify the unique, stand-alone building blocks of a social security administration. The method allows for a structured, systematic analysis of the business issues of social security vis-à-vis the available software and tools. Modeling a business as a network of components can lead to improvements in the critical areas of efficiency, strategic planning, and flexibility.

Mr. Al-Omran discussed the Social Insurance and Management Information System (SIMIS), the primary software application project of GOSI. SIMIS was developed for use by GOSI in the administration of its social insurance schemes, namely, the occupational hazards scheme and the annuities scheme for old age and disability. The project involved a strategic study of the information system requirements of GOSI's various functions, namely, social insurance, financial accounting and management functions including investments, fixed assets, real estate, inventory, payroll and human resource, procurement and contracts. SIMIS enabled a gradual shifting from a manual to an automated system of operations, and can easily accommodate any customization or future enhancement. The requirements of the possible users of SIMIS – citizens, establishments, government agencies – were analyzed to ensure that SIMIS will be responsive to their needs. SIMIS may be accessed through the Internet. GOSI also implemented a Web Services solution to handle the processing of forms. Because SIMIS is an open system, GOSI uses very strict policies and standards to ensure the security of hardware, software and processes. Among the challenges that SIMIS had to overcome were data migration from the old system, training of personnel to run and administer the technology, and overcoming user resistance through orientation sessions and training courses for all end-users.

In the discussions, a question was raised on how ICT systems can help in disaster recovery. It was noted that when a disaster occurs, immediate intervention is often required. A back-up system may help but setting up a more decentralized ICT system, one that is not overly reliant on one system, would also be useful. Other concerns focused on the challenges social security organizations face when new ICT systems are introduced. In addition to training the staff on the new system, the advice given was to put
the system in place, dry run and pilot test the system well in advance of any policy announcements on the new system. On the choice between a “big bang” or a phased approach, there is no one right answer. The most critical consideration is maintaining the integrity of the database. On the use of the Internet, it was opined that the Internet is just another channel or access method. Its usefulness or importance would depend on how it would interphase end-to-end with the system in place.

Closing session

Mrs. Nayantara Pathmarajah-Banna, Senior Programme Manager, Studies and Operations Branch, ISSA General Secretariat, summarized the highlights of the three-day proceedings. She noted that the diversity of the agenda of the Meeting was reflective of the range of priorities existing in the region. Four common threads marked the several important points raised during the discussions. First, the general consensus was that sustainability of existing social security schemes is a priority challenge requiring focused efforts to adopt a suitable strategy to maintain their viability based on specific national circumstances. Second, extension of coverage must be treated as a priority. To achieve progress in this area, it is essential that there be political commitment from the top and a clearly designed strategy of gradual implementation with innovative financing methods. Third, information communication technology in all its forms is an essential tool in the path towards greater efficiency. New innovative tools should be introduced to improve the administrative operations and the services rendered to clients. Fourth, the ultimate objective of all social security schemes is to provide adequate protection for their populations. Although the path may be slow and full of hurdles, policymakers and administrators should not deviate from this goal and greater efforts should be made to identify innovative mechanisms designed to overcome the hurdles.

Mr. Roger Barson delivered the vote of thanks on behalf of the participants of the Meeting of Directors.

Mrs. Corazon de la Paz thanked all the participants, the Korean hosts, the ISSA General Secretariat and the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. She reiterated an announcement made during the second day of the Meeting, namely, the invitation extended by the ISSA member organizations in India to host the next ISSA Regional Conference for Asia and Pacific in November 2006 in New Delhi. She then officially closed the Meeting of Directors.