



Climate change talks in Barcelona, 2-6 November 2009

Health leaders call for strong measures on climate change

Photos Available at: <http://pa.photoshelter.com/c/vanwaardenphoto/gallery/Health-Care-Without-Harm/G00002Vdu0UfUJg0> PASSWORD: hcwh

Barcelona, 4 November 2009 - Some of the world's largest medical, nursing and public health organisations are calling on world leaders to take bold action to address climate change. They say that this is needed to avert what could become a global public health crisis.

A giant placard, "Prescription for a Healthy Planet" symbolically represents the interests of millions of health professionals in more than 120 countries whose organisations have endorsed it. The placard will be handed to United Nations officials at the climate talks.

The Prescription diagnoses the global threats to public health that climate change poses while urging the world's governments to negotiate a strong, binding agreement. The groups are calling for the Copenhagen treaty to protect public health, set strong targets on emission reductions, promote clean energy, and mandate major funding for developing countries to address the climate crisis. (1)

"With this Prescription, health care leaders from around the world are speaking with one voice, insisting that an agreement in Copenhagen must protect both the planet and public health," says Pendo Maro, Senior Climate and Energy Advisor, Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) and Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), the two organizations which developed the Prescription in collaboration with the Climate and Health Council (CHC).

In the past two months the Prescription for a Healthy Planet has been endorsed by many major health organizations (2) including the International Council of Nurses, a global federation of national nursing organizations representing nurses in 128 countries. "Nurses need to take every opportunity to influence governments in relation to climate change. As front-line professionals, we see both the acute and chronic impact that damage to our environment has on health and the wellbeing of citizens," says David C Benton, ICN Chief Executive Officer.

Dr. Paulo M. Buss, President of the World Federation of Public Health Associations, another signatory of the Prescription adds: "As public health professionals, we have a duty to warn the world's governments that if they do not take bold action now, we face the spectre of a future of global public health crises generated or exacerbated by climate change."

Others who have endorsed the Prescription include International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE) and the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME), which represents 27 medical associations in Europe. In the United States, a parallel initiative from health care leaders representing hundreds of hospitals and nearly three million health professionals is calling on President Obama to support the points made in the Prescription. (3)

At the Barcelona talks, the Prescription will be handed to Dr Roberto Bertollini, top climate expert at the UN's specialist health agency, the World Health Organization. "At the WHO, we would like to see greater attention given the social and health impacts of climate change in the current negotiations. Population adaptation will require the active involvement of health systems and the necessary human and financial resources. We hope that the new treaty will meet these needs,

and we expect that this initiative from the health community in Barcelona will draw more attention to the health impacts of climate change and the necessary response," Dr Bertollini says.

The World Health Organization predicts that climate change will likely lead to significant increases in illness and death related to a number of factors: intense heat, floods and other extreme weather events; the deterioration of air quality; increased transmission of vector-borne and infectious diseases such as cholera, malaria, and dengue; and the compromising of agricultural production and food security causing malnutrition.

Many health care leaders agree. Dr. Dana Hanson, President of the World Medical Association recently said that he believes that, "climate change is likely eclipse the major known pandemics as the leading cause of death and disease in the 21st century."

In a parallel advocacy initiative, HEAL, HCWH and CHC are sending a letter to the UNFCCC negotiators about the Prescription recommendations and the need to increase the focus on health in the agreement. The letter says that the costs of unchecked climate change on health necessitate a significant reduction in carbon emissions on the part of wealthy nations. The letter also recommends that a significant proportion of resources should be allocated to the health sector from the global action fund financed by national contributions.

The costs to public health of climate change are likely to be high. In Europe alone, the estimated annual public health savings resulting from a 20% reduction in carbon emissions (from 1990 levels) by 2020 would be 52 billion Euros each year from 2020. (4) This figure would be significantly higher if health benefits globally were taken into account.

Contacts:

Diana Smith, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) mobile +33 6 33 04 2943. Diana@env-health.org
Pendo Maro, PhD, Senior Climate and Energy Advisor, HCWH/HEAL +32 495 281 494
Génon K. Jensen, Executive Director, Health & Environment Alliance (HEAL), Mobile: + 32 495 808732.
Anja Leetz, Executive Director, HCWH Europe, Mobile: +32 484 786 058 or +49 175 732 0657
Josh Karliner, International Coordinator, Health Care Without Harm, Mobile +1-415-613-5386

Notes to journalists

1. "Prescription for a Healthy Planet" initiative aims to increase focus on the effects on human health of climate change and to bring the voice of the health sector to the negotiations in the crucial weeks leading up to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change meeting in Copenhagen, 7-18 December 2009. More information at: www.climateandhealthcare.org
2. Signatories (in development): Ärztinnen und Ärzte für Umweltschutz; Climate and Health Council, UK; Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, UK; Committee on Sustainable Development in Health; European Public Health Alliance (EPHA); European Respiratory Society (ERS); Family Medicine Academic Society; Greening Healthcare, UK; Green Knowledge youth network; Hainaut Vigilance Sanitaire - Hygiène Publique en Hainaut, Belgium; Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL); Health Care Without Harm (HCWH); International Council of Nurses (ICN); International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE); ISDE Austria; ISDE Italy; ISDE Sweden; Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR); Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME); Swedish Doctors for the Environment (LfM); Swedish Medical Association; Women for Green Way for Generations; Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF); World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA).
3. The letter has been signed by health systems composed of hundreds of US hospitals and professionals associations representing the interests of millions of health care professionals, including the American Nurses Association (2.9 million registered nurses in the US) and the American Public Health Association (APHA) representing over 50,000 health professionals.

4. European Commission Assessment,
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/pdf/climat_action/climate_package_ja_annex.pdf

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) aims to raise awareness of how environmental protection improves health. It brings together more than 60 organizations working at the European level. Website: www.env-health.org

Health Care Without Harm is a global network of more than 470 organizations in 52 countries working to transform the health care sector so it is no longer a source of harm to people and the environment. Website: www.noharm.org