



PRESS RELEASE

For distribution at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) preparatory conference in Bonn (1-12 June 2009) where decision-makers are negotiating important texts in the lead-up to COP 15 in Copenhagen in December 2009, where a major new climate change deal is to be agreed.

Call for "health check" at climate change talks

Bonn, 10 June 2009 – Two leading international health organisations are calling for a greater number of health experts to be included in climate change discussions.

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and Healthcare Without Harm Europe (HCWH) say that although human health is already being seriously affected by climate change, less than 1% of government participants involved in the process are from the health sector.

The two organizations have asked the European Commission to include a group of top-level health experts in the EU delegation to the crucial "COP 15" climate change talks planned for Copenhagen in December 2009. (1)

"With the world's governments moving closer to a new agreement on tackling climate change in Copenhagen this December, the health sector must have a fair chance to bring attention to serious human health concerns and to focus on the best policy options for human health and the society at large," said Pendo Maro, Joint Senior Climate Change and Energy Advisor for HEAL and HCWH, who is in Bonn. (2)

HEAL and HCWH want to see the combined economic, social and health "co-benefits" of strong climate change policy highlighted in the negotiations. Research projections show that premature deaths and hospital admissions can be avoided as a result of the cleaner air associated with a strong package on climate change. (3)

Global warming is already causing 300,000 deaths per year. Increasingly severe heatwaves, floods, storms and forest fires could push up the annual death toll to 500,000 by 2030, according to a report published by the Global Humanitarian Forum, the think tank of former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, in May 2009. (4)

Funding for health projects is very low. In April 2009, Dr Roberto Bertollini, Senior Advisor and Coordinator, Public Health and Environment Department, World Health Organization told a meeting of health and environment ministers from 53 European countries that although 32 of the world's 38 poorest countries identified health in their national action plans on climate change, funding for health has received only less than 1% of allocations under the climate change framework. (5)

He also asked for the under-representation of health expertise in the climate change talks to be addressed. He said that only about 20 of the official 10,000 participants to the UNFCCC process are from the health sector. (5)

The health sector is already working to reduce its carbon footprint. A recently released WHO-HCWH-HEAL report provides case studies of what hospitals are doing. For example, the Constance Hospital in Baden-Wurttemberg, Germany has converted to "combined heat and

power" technology, installed solar panels and improved its thermal insulation - resulting in a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions of 25%. (6)

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Notes for journalists

1. The two health organizations, Health and Environment Alliance and Health Care Without Harm have sent a letter to the European Commission addressed to President Jose Manuel Barroso, Commissioner for Environment Stavros Dimas; Commissioner for Health Androulla Vassiliou, and copied to Ministers of Health of Member States of the European Union asking for a European health delegation to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009.

2. The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and HealthCare Without Harm (HCWH) want to see aid agencies, international institutions and intergovernmental negotiations:

- Establish a framework that will promote health, social justice, and survival for current and future generations.
- Ensure that international agreements and financing mechanisms support climate change mitigation by the health sector worldwide.
- Encourage financial assistance that promotes climate-friendly and environmentally sustainable health facilities.

3. If the European Union increased its target greenhouse gas emission reductions from the present 20% to 30%, the total savings from death and ill-health due to respiratory conditions alone could reach an additional 25 billion Euros per year by 2020. Fewer emissions result in cleaner air, fewer premature deaths among people with existing respiratory problems, 5,300 fewer cases of bronchitis, and 2,800 fewer hospital admissions each year. See report from HEAL, CAN Europe and WWF entitled "The co-benefits to health of a strong EU climate change policy" available at http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Co-benefits_to_health_report_september_2008.pdf

4. Human Impact Report, The Anatomy of a Silent Crisis, Global Humanitarian Forum, available at <http://www.ghf-geneva.org/>

5. "Climate Change and Health: The Global Perspective" presentation by Dr Roberto Bertollini, Senior Advisor and Coordinator, Public Health and Environment Department, World Health Organization, Geneva (copy available on request from Diana Smith, Diana@gsmith.com.fr or +33 6 33 04 2943)

6. "Healthy Hospitals, Healthy Planet, Healthy People: Addressing climate change in health care settings", Discussion Draft is available at www.noharm.org or <http://env-health.org/a/3351>

Health Care Without Harm is a global network of more than 440 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.

The Health and Environment Alliance 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

