



## Press release

**HEALTH DAY, Cancun, Mexico, Monday 6 September 2010**

### **Message to EU delegation: Don't forget the health dividend**

**Brussels, 6 December 2010** - A "Cancun Climate and Health Statement" to be announced today, during Health Day in Cancun, highlights the benefits to health of strong climate change policy. (1) It has been sent to European Union delegates and members of the European Parliament delegation taking part in the climate change talks in Mexico.

Developed and signed by ten leading global medical and health groups, it calls on negotiators to consider the real costs of strong action on climate change by taking into account the benefits for health. (2)

"We urge the EU delegates to use the recent findings on the huge public health benefits of strong action on climate change to convince others that at least a 30% target is needed," says Pendo Maro, Senior Climate Change and Energy Policy Advisor, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and Health Care Without Harm Europe (HCWH Europe). "It is high time for governments to realise that reducing greenhouse gas emissions will improve human health and save them money."

Dr Maro is part of a delegation organised by the Health and Environment Alliance and Health Care Without Harm Europe. It is working with other European and international groups, such as the World Medical Association, the Standing Committee for European Doctors and the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) to bring the health benefits message to the delegations and negotiators. (3)

MEP Jo Leinen, a German socialist is leading the EU parliamentary delegation to Mexico. He is pressing European negotiators to sign up to a firm target of a 30% reduction of carbon dioxide emissions by 2020, instead of the 20% that has so far been agreed. He told the British Medical Journal this week: "A 20% reduction will not be enough. Unless we have more ambition, we will miss the two degree target." (4) The EU's core objective is to keep global temperature rises below 2°C above pre-industrial levels to avoid the anticipated impacts of climate change.

Mr Leinen says health should be on the agenda in Cancun. "As part of the industrialised world, the EU has a historic responsibility for climate change and its effects, including the severe threats to human health, which must be considered in climate mitigation and adaptation strategies," he says. (5)

Strong policy to mitigate climate change can in itself benefit public health because as greenhouse gas emissions fall so do harmful air pollutants. Recent research published by the Health and Environment Alliance and Health Care Without Harm Europe shows that up to 30.5 billion Euros of public health benefits could be achieved each year by 2020 if the European Union moved from the current 20% target on greenhouse gas emissions to adopting a policy of 30% domestic cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. (6)

Such savings would go a considerable way to covering the estimated costs of implementing a 30% target in Europe. The European Commission says moving from a 20% to a 30% domestic target would cost 46 billion Euros per year in 2020. (7)

More importantly, the health benefits associated with cleaner air are only part of the potential gains. Last year, the Lancet medical journal published a series of articles showing huge health benefits from other aspects of climate change policy. For example, a study in London and New Delhi showed that lower carbon policies associated more "active transport" (walking and cycling), more public transport and reduced use of private cars would produce measurable benefits for heart disease, cerebro-vascular disease, dementia, breast cancer, lung cancer, colon cancer, diabetes, and depression. (8)

The impact of climate change on public health and health services has been witnessed at first hand by many doctors in Europe. The heat wave during the summer of 2003 resulted in high rates of hospital admissions and tens of thousands of additional deaths. The European Respiratory Society has shown that a one degree Celsius increase in temperature above specific city levels produces a 1-3% increase in deaths in the general population and a 6% increase in deaths among people with existing respiratory conditions. (9)

Dr Pendo Maro, Health Care Without Harm Europe (HCWH Europe) and Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) at [pendo@env-health.org](mailto:pendo@env-health.org) or [pendo.maro@hcwh.org](mailto:pendo.maro@hcwh.org) + 32 495 281 494 (in Cancun)

Diana Smith, Health and Environment Alliance, [Diana@env-health.org](mailto:Diana@env-health.org) Mobile: +33 6 33 04 2943 (in Paris)

#### Notes for journalists

1. Cancun Climate and Health Statement available at [www.env-health.org](http://www.env-health.org) and [www.hcwh.org](http://www.hcwh.org) It calls on the negotiators to "take into account the significant human health dimensions of the climate crisis along with the health benefits of climate change mitigation and adaptation policies."
2. The Cancun Climate and Health Statement is signed by ten organisations: Climate and Health Council, International Federation of Medical Students' Associations, Health and Environment Alliance, Health Care Without Harm, International Council of Nurses, International Society of Doctors for the Environment, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Standing Committee of European Doctors, World Federation of Public Health Associations, and World Medical Association (WMA) It has also been endorsed by Richard Horton, Editor, The Lancet, and Fiona Godlee, Editor, British Medical Journal.
3. The delegation comprises Pendo Maro (see above), Dr Michael Wilks, Climate Advisor and Immediate Past President of the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME), Professor Hugh Montgomery, University College London, UK, and Walter Vernon (HCWH US Board), San Francisco, USA, more about them at [www.env-health.org](http://www.env-health.org) and <http://www.noharm.org/europe/issues/climate/> Other groups with whom we are working in Cancun include: International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) and Nurses Across the Borders (Nigeria).
4. European parliament sets sights high for Cancun climate change talks, Rory Watson, *BMJ* 341:doi:10.1136/bmj.c6732 (Published 24 November 2010)
5. Personal communication to HEAL.
6. "Acting Now for better health, A 30% reduction target for EU climate policy", HEAL and HCWHE, Brussels, September 2010
7. European Commission Communication, May 2010, COM (2010) 265 final. Analysis of options to move beyond 20% greenhouse gas emission reductions and assessing the risk of carbon leakage.
8. The Lancet Series, Health and Climate Change, November 2009, "Public health benefits of strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions: urban land transport.
9. ERS Position Statement, Climate change and respiratory disease: European Respiratory Society position statement, J G Ayres et al, *European Respiratory Journal* 2009; 34: 295-302 <http://erj.ersjournals.com/cgi/reprint/34/2/295>

**Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)** aims to raise awareness of how environmental protection and sustainability improves health and to empower the health community to contribute their expertise to policy making. Since its inception, HEAL's membership has grown to include a diverse network of more than 60 citizens', patients', women's, health professionals' and environmental organizations across Europe which together have a strong track record in increasing public and expert engagement in both EU debates and the decision-making process. Website: [www.env-health.org](http://www.env-health.org)

**Health Care Without Harm (HCWH)** is a global network of more than 484 organisations in 53 countries working to transform the health care sector so it is no longer a source of harm to people and the environment. <http://www.noharm.org/>