

Durban Declaration on Climate and Health

Durban, December 4, 2011

The World Health Organization predicts that unmitigated climate change will lead to significant increases in illness and death brought on by environmental changes. These include the spread of cholera, malaria, dengue and other diseases; the compromising of agricultural production and food security; an increase in extreme weather events, floods, droughts, heat waves and more. The health of many communities is already suffering as a consequence of climate change.

Indeed, according to the Lancet, climate change is the greatest global health threat of the 21st century.¹

At the same time, there is strong evidence that action on climate change can deliver significant and immediate benefits to health. For instance, lowering greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels will also simultaneously reduce harmful air pollution that negatively impacts the health of millions of people around the world.

Here in Durban, at the UNFCCC's 17th Conference of the Parties, the world's governments have an opportunity to confront this threat and agree upon solutions. Governments can commit to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a manner that is equitable, as well as economically and ecologically viable. Such effective and immediate action to mitigate climate change would protect and advance global public health.

An agreement that aims to avoid dangerous climate change, keeping global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius, must promote a transition from fossil fuels to clean, renewable energy and low carbon economies. It must foster major emissions reductions from those who pollute the most, while providing support for those least responsible for the crisis to develop a low carbon pathway that meets peoples' needs. Such an agreement would have the added benefit of protecting local communities and large urban populations from the immediate health impacts of fossil fuel production and combustion, thereby reducing healthcare costs and saving lives.

Without such an agreement, climate change will increase the global burden of disease and deepen health inequities between and within countries. This will raise health care costs worldwide, while undermining and overwhelming public health infrastructure in both rich and poor countries. The overwhelming burden will fall on the most vulnerable -- those living in poor countries, who have contributed least to greenhouse gas emissions.

Having gathered at the first Global Climate and Health Summit, in Durban on December 4, 2011, we—as health professionals, public health advocates, and healthcare policy makers from more than 30 countries-- hereby call on national delegations to the UNFCCC's 17th Conference of the Parties to:

¹ "Managing the Health Effects of Climate Change" The Lancet, Volume 373, Issue 9676, Pages 1693 - 1733, 16 May 2009.

- Recognize the health benefits of climate mitigation and take bold and substantive action to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions in order to protect and promote public health.
- Ensure greater health sector representation on national delegations as well as within key mechanisms of the UNFCCC, recognizing the role of the World Health Organization as the voice for public health within the UN system.
- Actively include the participation and empowerment of youth, women and indigenous peoples in the climate change processes.
- Adopt a strong second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol which currently includes emission reduction targets for the time until 2012, to protect and continue the only binding climate law the world has;
- By 2015, negotiate a fair, ambitious and binding agreement that, consistent with the Prescription for a Healthy Planet, endorsed by more than 130 health organisations in Copenhagen in 2009:
 - Places the protection of human health as a primary objective of any agreement.
 - Establishes an ambitious fair shares framework to reduce global emissions (based on the principles of Equity and Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities) in order to avoid a global public health disaster.
 - Fosters both energy efficiency and clean, renewable energy that protects public health by reducing both local and global pollution.
 - Provides the immediate necessary resources to operationalize the Green Fund, and in the longer term, appropriate mitigation and adaptation funding required to address the health impacts of climate change, assuring all countries' Rights to Sustainable Development and their ability to pursue a low carbon development pathway.

The matter is urgent. The health of the world's population is at risk.

The time for action is now.

Climate and Health Alliance, Australia

Climate and Health Council, United Kingdom

Democratic Nurses Association of South Africa

Doctors for Human Kind Foundation, Nigeria

FHI360

Haley's Health Initiative, South Africa

Health Care Without Harm

Health and Environment Alliance, Europe

Hospice Palliative Care Association, South Africa

International Council of Nurses

International Federation of Medical Students Associations

Irish Doctors' Environmental Association

KwaZulu Natal Provincial Research Forum, South Africa

Maromi Health Research, South Africa

People's Health Movement, South Africa

Plurimedia, Mozambique

The Pollution Research Group, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

Projeto Hospitais Saudáveis, Brazil

Public Health Institute, US

Sustainable Enterprise for Enabling Development (SEED) Trust

SDECA (Merebank), South Africa

Sidala Ecology Solutions, South Africa

The South African Medical Association

South Africa Institute of Environmental Health

South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, South Africa

WEMOS

Wits Reproductive Health and HIV Initiative, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa

World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts

World Federation of Public Health Associations

World Medical Association

World Vision