



OPEN LETTER

Dear:

Commission President, Mr. Jose Manuel Barroso
Commissioner for Environment, Mr. Stavros Dimas
Commissioner for Health, Ms. Androulla Vassiliou
cc: Ministers of Health of Member States of the European Union

RE: Improving health representation in climate change discussions and outcomes

Call for EU Health delegation at climate change talks

The coming days are crucial to the preparations for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009. We call on you to ensure a high-level delegation of EU Health Ministers and officials take part in the preparatory meetings and in Copenhagen.

Human health is already being seriously affected by climate change. Global warming causes 300,000 deaths per year and increasingly severe heatwaves, floods, storms and forest fires could increase 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 2009.¹

Yet, the health benefits of tackling climate change are numerous. For example, our recently co-published report² shows that if the European Union increased its target on greenhouse gas emission reductions from the present 20% to 30% then the total savings from health 'co-benefits' could reach an additional 25 billion Euros per year by 2020. These savings are due to cleaner air that would mean fewer premature deaths among people with existing respiratory problems, 5,300 fewer cases of bronchitis, and 2,800 fewer hospital admissions each year.

It is essential that the health sector has a fair chance to bring attention to serious human health concerns and to focus policy solutions on measures that would bring the most benefits to human health and society at large.

The health sector is already taking measures to address its climate footprint while simultaneously promoting health. In a recent document³ co-produced by the World Health Organisation (WHO), we also call on the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December 2009 to specifically promote and facilitate climate change mitigation by the health

¹ Human Impact Report, The Anatomy of a Silent Crisis, Global Humanitarian Forum, available at <http://www.ghf-geneva.org/>

² HEAL, CAN Europe and WWF report 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

³ "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>

sector. Prioritising primary health care and pursuing disease prevention strategies, in order to lower dependence on resource-intensive therapies, can simultaneously reduce the burden of disease and the health sector's fossil fuel consumption.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that health becomes a cornerstone of international and EU climate change policy.

Sincerely,



Genon Jensen
Executive Director
Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)



Anja Leetz
Executive Director
Healthcare Without Harm Europe (HCWH E)

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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