



HEAL and ECO Forum Statement

Sixtieth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

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As representatives of civil society from across the European Region, HEAL and ECO Forum represented here by Eco-Accord Moscow and Women in Europe for a Common Future. We are pleased to provide some comments on the future of the environment and health process and our views on the challenges and immense benefits to the health sector by taking this forward.

Today, more than ever, increased political action and public education is needed to address the environmental health challenges of our time. We see an increased burden of disease from non-communicable diseases with an environmental cause; including respiratory diseases, birth defects and cancer

These causes range from; **environmental mismanagement** of forests and wetlands as one of the causes for forest-fires all over the European region and **lack of preventive health action** for extreme weather events related to climate change to; **long term low-dose exposure to hazardous chemicals** in environment, products, homes and workplaces, such as Obsolete Pesticides, Chrysotile Asbestos and Biphenol-A, to mention just a few and **high level concentration of suspended particles** from the transport and industry sectors

These challenges demonstrate the intrinsic linkage of environment and health.

The challenges also present strategic opportunities for the health sector, to both take forward **prevention policies** on the environmental front, and to **reduce the environmental impacts on public health**, and the related **costs to health care systems and the economy** – particularly with rising numbers of chronic diseases; such as cancer which cost globally 895 billion dollars in 2008 - 1,5% of the world GDP.

The **Parma Declaration and Commitment to Act** offer an ideal framework to bring prevention into policies - making a significant difference to reducing ill health and death, as well as rising healthcare costs.

We welcome that this environment and health process has not been shy to address issues which are complex in nature and in some countries have a strong industry lobby.

The formation of the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board creates a unique opportunity to bring real leadership to the policy process on environment and health.

Policy makers must set incentives for sustainable management of environmental resources, and for preventive action to protect human health. The health sector can play a leading role in this.

We welcome the mention of **energy efficient health services** and urge member states to implement the Framework for Climate Action. This is a good example of Green Economy - bringing an understanding of the numerous benefits of good health into economic fora.

Citizens expect political leaders to act on existing and emerging threats to environment and health and to take preventive measures. These actions cannot be a top down process. The **new structures being** created here must include a bottom up approach in the form involvement and collaboration with non-governmental organizations.

Our message then, is one of involvement and positive discussion.

In addition to mentioning in the draft WHO resolution the involvement of youth, **we call on member states to support** the continued involvement of **civil society** through representative **networks of environmental NGOs and health NGO**. We are pleased to see that they are explicitly mentioned in the formation of the Environment and Health Task Force and we look forward to contributing to this valuable technical body. But we would like to see the recognition of the crucial role of civil society when outlining the way forward - **in points 10d and 11c** of the declaration. We also call for **observer status** in relation to the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board for NGOs and other stakeholder groups.

From the beginning of the environment and health process, NGOs have played an essential role in ensuring that the process is known with citizens and that concerns of vulnerable groups are taken into account.

We, NGOs are fully committed to bring our expertise and voice of the public into the new structures and processes. Among others, the environmental NGOs are contributing to a high level conference on the Rotterdam Convention and the management of hazardous chemicals, including chrysotile asbestos, next Month, here in Moscow. We have copies of the programme for those who are interested. We look forward to working with you to ensure health and wellbeing and a healthy planet for all.