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Joint Press Release

New Publication on NCDs: Environmental factors one of the main causes of preventable deaths

Civil Society Groups release, in cooperation with UNEP, first publication about non-communicable diseases and environmental determinants

Utrecht, August 27, 2013 - **Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are now the leading cause of preventable morbidity and related disability, and thus significantly affect the wellbeing of many individuals and workers' daily lives. NCDs cause 60 per cent of all deaths worldwide and 18 out of 35 million annual deaths related to NCDs are women¹. Besides well known risk factors like tobacco smoke, toxic chemicals and radiation are important determinants for NCDs; however they are so far not sufficiently recognized by policy makers.**

A new publication aims to provide latest knowledge on Non-Communicable Diseases from some of the leading experts and organisations from four perspectives: women's organisations, health sector, developing countries and trade unions. The authors identify the links of NCDs with environmental pollution in these four areas and shares priorities for preventive policy action as well as sharing instructive case studies. The publication clearly demonstrates environmental factors as major determinants for NCDs, and the related challenge for sustainability.

Sascha Gabizon, Executive Director of the Women's and Environmental Network WECEF: 'It is fully unacceptable that our governments do not take stronger measures to protect public health from pollution-related diseases, which are entirely preventable! 35 million deaths annually linked to contamination from waste, chemicals, pesticides and radiation are a shame for humanity. It is very problematic to see the increase of Non Communicable Diseases in Africa; toxic waste such as e-waste and harmful pesticides are dumped by companies from industrialized countries in Africa, earning money on the backs of the local population who pay with their lives. Women are often the first to notice, as babies and children are the most vulnerable, and even small daily doses of exposure, to harmful chemicals in food, air, water and baby-products, can cause irreversible damage to children's health'.

Genon Jensen, Executive Director of HEAL states: 'For many non-communicable diseases, stopping the pollution is a big part of the solution. This publication shows why, how and where policy makers and health leaders must acknowledge the links between diseases and environmental contamination and tackle this problem. Compelling stories of doctors, cancer groups and leading scientists becoming engaged to reduce our exposure to toxic chemicals shows just how real this concern is. HEAL hopes this publication will help policy makers speed up their action, particularly with regard to policies on Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs) in the EU and globally'.

Laura Murillo from Sustainlabour says "NCDs cause more than half of workplaces fatalities worldwide. More than 1 million workers die every year due to these causes and estimations are low due to under reporting. Many of them are due to exposure to hazardous substances.

¹ WHO (2005): Preventing Chronic Diseases: A Vital Investment: WHO Global Report, Geneva

From the 30.000 different chemicals used widely in our workplaces, only 1% have been tested. In the meantime workers die from cancer, respiratory diseases, or suffer reproductive or neurological diseases, endocrine alterations, allergies etc. In Europe 3.5% of cancer deaths could be due to occupational exposure. This bleeding has to stop, we need to promote a preventive culture at the workplace and to eliminate and substitute the most hazardous substances. Some steps forward are easily feasible as a global ban of the most hazardous pesticides.”

Olga Speranskaya, winner of the Goldman Environmental Award and IPEN co-chair adds: “Almost every NCD can be traced to toxic contamination of air, water, food, consumer products and waste. It is the responsibility of governments and industry to eliminate the cause of diseases by reducing chemical pollution and acknowledging the work of environmental and health groups to protect peoples’ right to green livelihood and sustainable future”.

About this publication

This publication results from a cooperation of Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF), Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), SustainLabour and International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN), with the Regional Office for Europe of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) in the context of active participation and engagement of major groups and stakeholders in environment and health agenda setting, policy dialogue and decision-making.

WECF and HEAL represent the environmental NGOs and health NGOs (respectively) in the policy process on Environment and Health of WHO-Europe. WECF, SustainLabour and IPEN represent civil society, women and workers in the international policy processes on chemicals, in particular the Stockholm Convention, Basel Convention and Rotterdam Convention, and the Strategic Approach to Chemicals Management (SAICM) whose secretariats are hosted with UNEP. WECF, Umweltinstitut Munich, Japan Women’s Watch and Social Eco Fund Kazakhstan have specific expertise in the area of radioactive contamination and its health impacts. This publication aims to provide latest knowledge and perspectives on the environmental detriments of non communicable diseases (NCDs) as a contribution to a number of ongoing international policy processes (including on global sustainable development goals) and as a response to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development ‘Rio+20’ in June 2012 and the World Health Organisation’s NCD summit in September 2011.

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