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BRUSSELS, 28 FEBRUARY 2020

RE : Letter to the Environment Council of the European Union on urgency of EU action on air quality in 2020

Dear member of the Environment Council of the European Union,

On 5 March 2020, during the meeting of the Environment Council of the European Union, you will adopt Council conclusions on Air Quality.

Air pollution is the top environmental threat to health, leading to 400 000 premature deaths per year across the EU¹. It is a leading risk factor² for major chronic diseases including cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. New studies also show a link between air pollution and obesity, diabetes and neurological conditions. Vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, the poor, or those already ill are particularly at risk. The large body of evidence makes it clear that there is no safe level for air pollution, either indoors or outdoors.

As organisations from the health sector representing doctors, nurses, public health institutes, researchers, non-profit health insurers and patients, we are writing to you on behalf of thousands of individuals concerned across the EU to express our support for the EU Green Deal Communication commitments to the zero emission and zero pollution ambition.

In particular, the EU Commission's promise to align the current air quality standards more closely with the science-based recommendation of the World Health Organization (WHO) is a major and long awaited step forward³. It is now crucial to move past the announcement stage and propose a concrete and short timeline to implement WHO guidelines as EU standards, for the health of all Europeans.

In the upcoming Council Conclusions on Air Quality, we therefore call on you to:

- Reflect the urgency to act on air pollution for health protection: the positive effects of this Green Deal need to be breathable by the end of the current EU Commission' mandate, with Member States leading the way towards the proper implementation of air quality regulation.

¹ European Environment Agency (EEA). Air quality in Europe — 2019 report . EEA Report No 10/2019
<https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/air-quality-in-europe-2019>

² World Health Organisation (WHO) – Regional office for Europe. Review of evidence on health aspects of air pollution –REVIHAAP Project Technical Report – 2013.

http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/193108/REVIHAAP-Final-technical-report-final-version.pdf?ua=1

³ Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) – Eight demands for clean air in the European Region – infographic
<https://www.env-health.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Infographic-eight-demands.pdf>

- Translate the urgency into action by paving the way forward: the EU Green Deal ambition needs to take the shape of clear steps for clean air in 2020, with a view to aligning the EU air standards with the WHO guidelines. All current and future legislation regulating air quality should come under one clean air strategy framing.

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), the European Federation of Allergy & Airways Diseases Patients' Association (EFA), the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), the European Respiratory Society (ERS) and Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME) are looking forward to a public debate preceding the adoption of ambitious Council Conclusion on air quality next week and supporting you in delivering the path to a healthy planet for healthy people, and thus preventing healthcare cost related to air pollution.

Yours sincerely,

Génon K. Jensen, Executive Director, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

Susanna Palkonen, Director, European Federation of Allergy & Airways Diseases Patients' Association (EFA)

Sascha Marschang, Acting Secretary-General, European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)

Barbara Hoffmann, Chair of the ERS Environment and Health Committee, European Respiratory Society (ERS)

Annabel Seeböhm, Secretary General, Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME)

The **Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)** is the leading not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects human health in the European Union (EU) and beyond. HEAL works to shape laws and policies that promote planetary and human health and protect those most affected by pollution, and raise awareness on the benefits of environmental action for health. HEAL's over 80 member organisations include international, European, national and local groups of health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts representing over 200 million people across the 53 countries of the WHO European Region. As an alliance, HEAL brings independent and expert evidence from the health community to EU and global decision-making processes to inspire disease prevention and to promote a toxic-free, low-carbon, fair and healthy future. HEAL's EU Transparency Register Number: 00723343929-96 <https://www.env-health.org/>

The **European Federation of Allergy & Airways Diseases Patients' Association (EFA)** is the umbrella organisation of 43 allergy, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) patients' organisations in 25 European countries. EFA represents European patients with allergy, asthma and COPD advocating for their right to live uncompromised lives, have access to the best quality care and a safe environment. EFA's EU Transparency Register Number: 28473847513-94 <https://www.efanet.org/>

The **European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)** is a change agent – Europe's leading NGO advocating for better health. We are a dynamic member-led organisation, made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups working together to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe. EPHA's Transparency Register Number: 18941013532-08 <http://www.epha.org/>

The **European Respiratory Society** is an international organisation that brings together physicians, healthcare professionals, scientists and other experts working in respiratory medicine. We are one of the leading medical organisations in the respiratory field, with a growing membership representing over 160 countries. <https://www.ersnet.org/>

The **Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME)** represents national medical associations across Europe. CPME is committed to contributing the medical profession's point of view to EU institutions and European policy-making through pro-active cooperation on a wide range of health and healthcare related issues. <https://www.cpme.eu/>