

United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Non-Communicable Diseases

Advocacy Brief and Letter Template

1. Background

There has been significant progress over the last 12 months in global advocacy for Non-Communicable Diseases (diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and chronic respiratory disease) and addressing their prevention (tobacco use, unhealthy diets, lack of exercise and treatment). At the World Health Assembly in May 2009, a joint campaign was launched by the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), World Heart Federation (WHF) and International Against Cancer (UICC) calling for:

- A United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Non-Communicable Disease (NCD UNGASS)
- NCD indicators to be included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs *) Review Summit in September 2010
- Funding for Essential NCD Medicines

This was followed by a global civil society campaign ahead of the November 2009 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, asking the 54 Commonwealth Heads of Government to issue a call for an UNGASS. This campaign resulted in Commonwealth Heads of Government issuing a special statement on NCDs which included a call for an UNGASS. The 54 Commonwealth Heads of Government come from a diverse group of countries spanning 5 continents, representing one-third of the world's people and one-quarter of member states in the United Nations.

Momentum for the UNGASS has been building quickly over the previous weeks following a briefing for UN Ambassadors held in New York on 5th February hosted by the Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM), at which they announced their intention to introduce a United Nations General Assembly resolution asking Member States to support an UNGASS on NCDs. The latest draft of the UN Resolution is attached to this brief.

Following a civil society meeting of key stakeholders on 25th February, it was agreed that a joint national lobbying campaign, coordinated by the global representatives of the key NCD constituencies (IDF, WHF, UICC, Global Alliance Against Chronic Respiratory Diseases [GARD], Framework Convention Alliance [FCA] and others) was instrumental to building the necessary support for these goals.

* In September 2000 world leaders came together at United Nations Headquarters in New York to adopt eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs, which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS by the target date of 2015, form a blueprint agreed to by world leaders and development institutions.

2. Mobilizing Support for the NCD UNGASS

CARICOM Ambassadors in New York have started official negotiations with other UN member states on the draft UNGASS resolution. Negotiations are expected to take 2-3 weeks and a final vote on the resolution could take place between mid-April and the beginning of May.

Intense lobbying is needed at national level over the coming weeks to ensure a high level of awareness and support amongst governments. For a successful vote on the UNGASS Resolution, we need national civil society advocates to secure the support of their national delegations to the UN in New York, either directly through their country's UN Ambassador, or indirectly through their Head of State, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Health, and other key national government contacts. The support of Ministers of Foreign Affairs is particularly essential given that UN Ambassadors report to them.

Since CARICOM states are introducing the resolution and fully support it, it may be useful for civil society organizations from the CARICOM region to contact their government representatives and pledge their support for the resolution.

IDF, WHF and the UICC would like to share the following key messages which you may wish to consider modifying and/or communicating to your member organizations and supporters:

- 57 Countries (list attached) have declared their support for an A United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Non-Communicable Diseases. These Heads of Government include members of the G8, OECD, European Union, G77, and key UN bodies such as the UN Security Council and ECSOCOC. Many more countries have voiced support at Ministerial level.
- Non-communicable diseases, which include diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and chronic respiratory disease and the common risk factors of tobacco use, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity, cause 60% of all deaths globally, 80% of which are in low- and middle-income countries. The World Health Organization projects that global deaths from non-communicable diseases will continue to rise over the next 10 years, with the African region expected to see the highest relative increase (27%). There is an increasing body of evidence showing that the impact of NCDs on individuals, communities, and countries is undermining achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.
- Non-communicable diseases are a major cause of poverty, a barrier to economic development, and a neglected global emergency. An UNGASS on NCDs can help change this by raising the profile of NCDs on the global stage, mobilizing the international community to take action, and securing the commitment of Heads of State to lead the cross-government effort necessary to reverse the epidemic. The HIV/AIDS UNGASS held in 2001 resulted in a Heads of State Declaration of Commitment that paved the way for the urgent international response that followed and helped stabilize the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
- The Millennium Development Goals state that health is critical to the economic, political and social development of all countries, yet they contain no goals or targets for NCDs, the largest burden of disease in low- and middle-income countries (LMCs).
- A recent survey by the Centre for Global Development in Washington showed that only 0.9% of the US\$22 billion spent on health by international aid agencies in low- and middle-income countries is spent on NCDs, despite NCDs forming 60% of the burden of disease in those countries. Governments in LMCs need both financial and technical assistance to turn around the NCD epidemic that threatens to undo development gains made over the last decade.
- Integrating the prevention of non-communicable diseases into the global health and development agendas is not only achievable but also a priority for developing countries. Now is the time for action.

Annex 1 – List of Countries that have pledged support for an NCD UNGASS

1. Antigua and Barbuda
2. Australia
3. The Bahamas
4. Bangladesh
5. Barbados
6. Belize
7. Botswana
8. Brunei Darussalam
9. Cameroon
10. Canada
11. Cyprus
12. Dominica
13. Fiji Islands
14. The Gambia
15. Ghana
16. Grenada
17. Guyana
18. Haiti
19. India
20. Jamaica
21. Kenya
22. Kiribati
23. Lesotho
24. Malawi
25. Malaysia
26. Maldives
27. Malta
28. Mauritius
29. Mozambique
30. Namibia
31. Nauru
32. New Zealand
33. Nigeria
34. Pakistan
35. Papua New Guinea
36. Russia
37. Rwanda
38. Suriname
39. St Kitts and Nevis
40. St Lucia
41. St Vincent and the Grenadines
42. Samoa
43. Seychelles
44. Sierra Leone
45. Singapore
46. Solomon Islands
47. South Africa
48. Sri Lanka
49. Swaziland
50. Tonga
51. Trinidad and Tobago
52. Tuvalu
53. Uganda
54. United Kingdom
55. United Republic of Tanzania
56. Vanuatu
57. Zambia

Annex 2: Supporting Documents

Document 1: Draft UN Resolution: UN Summit on Non-Communicable Diseases

Document 2: Commonwealth Heads of Government Statement

Document 3: ECOSOC High Level Segment Communiqué (July 2009)

Document 4: 126th WHO Executive Board MDG Review Paper

Document 5: NCD Advocacy Newsletter: UNGASS Update

Document 6: List of Key Country Groupings and Top 15 Donors

Annex 3: Possible Letter Template for National and Regional Civil Society Networks

Upcoming General Assembly Resolution on a United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Non-Communicable Diseases

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing to seek your support for a draft resolution (attached) that will be tabled at the United Nations General Assembly in several weeks by CARICOM member states requesting the General Assembly to hold a United Nations Special Summit on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in September 2011.

This resolution follows a statement issued by 54 Commonwealth Heads of State calling for “a Summit on NCDs to be held in September 2011, under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly, in order to develop strategic responses to these diseases and their repercussions”.

The impact of NCDs (diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases) and their common risk factors (tobacco use, unhealthy diets and lack of exercise) on the social and economic development of all UN countries is enormous and has particularly impacted low- and middle- income countries, where they cause 14 million premature deaths each year and reduce GDP growth by up to 5%.

Non-communicable diseases are a growing epidemic and cause 60% of all deaths globally. NCDs are also a major poverty issue since of those deaths, 80% occur in low- and middle-income countries. The World Health Organisation projects that global deaths from NCDs will continue to rise over the next 10 years, with the African region expected to see the highest relative increase (27%). However, through a coordinated global response led by Heads of State, this epidemic can be reversed and the majority of NCDs can be prevented.

NCDs have become the neglected global epidemic, and with your leadership, we can work together to save millions of lives and reverse the damaging social and economic effects of these diseases. Your support for a United Nations General Assembly Special Summit on Non-Communicable Diseases would be greatly valued by public health advocates in this country and globally.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you would like further information or assistance.

Yours sincerely,

<Name and Organization>

cc: Minister of Foreign Affairs
Minister of Health
UN Ambassador