



**EMBARGOED UNTIL TUESDAY 19 May 09.00 am (GMT)**

## **Leading NGOs Call for International Action to Combat Epidemic of Non-communicable Diseases**

**GENEVA, Switzerland, May 19, 2009** – The International Diabetes Federation (IDF), International Union Against Cancer (UICC) and World Heart Federation (WHF) today issued a joint statement that calls on the international community to address urgently the epidemic of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), responsible for 35 million deaths a year. The statement demands a substantial increase in funding for NCDs and greater availability of essential medicines, among other urgent responses, in a way to accelerate achievement of the health Millennium Development Goals.

Public health experts are concerned about the impact of the global economic crisis and warn that the emerging epidemic of NCDs is threatening to overwhelm healthcare systems worldwide unless action is taken. Cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases cause 60% of all deaths worldwide, with four in every five of these deaths occurring in low- and middle-income countries. NCDs are an under-appreciated cause of poverty and now present a serious barrier to economic development. They are estimated to reduce gross domestic product (GDP) by up to 5% in many low- and middle-income countries, dealing a double blow to fragile economies struggling in the global recession.

Professor Pekka Puska, President of the World Heart Federation states: "We can no longer ignore the burden that cardiovascular disease, together with the other NCDs including diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases, is placing on countries that are least equipped to deal with them. We urgently call on the international community to ensure that the funding models applied to infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria are expanded to stop the spiralling death rates from NCDs before the most vulnerable are pushed further into the poverty trap."

### **NCDs impact on the world**

IDF, WHF and UICC are united by their concern with the consequences of physical inactivity, tobacco use and poor diet, three avoidable risk factors that contribute significantly to the NCDs responsible for 60% of global mortality.

Diabetes is a leading cause of blindness, kidney failure, heart attack, stroke and amputation. The number of people living with diabetes has increased considerably over the past 30 years. In 1985, an estimated 30 million people worldwide had diabetes. A little over a decade later, the figure had risen to over 150 million. Today, according to IDF figures, it exceeds 250 million. A further 300

million are at high risk of developing diabetes. Unless action is taken to implement effective prevention and control programmes, IDF predicts that the total number of people with diabetes will reach 380 million by 2025.

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death worldwide. An estimated 17.2 million people die from CVD each year, and that toll could increase to almost 20 million by 2015. The incidence of deaths attributable to CVD continues to rise sharply, accounting for 30% of all deaths globally. Around 80% of these deaths and 87% of related disabilities occur in low- and middle-income countries. Cardiovascular disease affects the heart or blood vessels and includes heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death worldwide. More than 11 million new cases are diagnosed each year, and about 8 million people die from cancer – over 70% of them in low- and middle-income countries. On current trends, 15.5 million people will be diagnosed with cancer in 2030, and about 12 million people will die from the disease. Yet, we have more knowledge than ever before on how to bring cancer under control. About one-third (30-40%) of all cancers can be prevented, a further third can be cured (given early diagnosis and treatment), and effective palliative care can be provided to patients.

In its *2009-2013 Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases*, the World Health Organization identifies international partnerships as paramount in the global struggle against NCDs. WHO calls for concerted action on a global scale and identifies a key role for non-governmental organizations. IDF, WHF and UICC have taken up this call. Combined, the three organizations represent the interests of 730 member organizations in over 170 countries. They have joined forces to create a powerful voice for change and urge the international community to take action in the face of the NCD epidemic.

Professor David Hill, President of the International Union against Cancer states: “Now, more than ever, we need to join efforts to give cancer and the other NCDs the priority they deserve. The advantages that stand to be gained from the strength of strategic international partnerships, such as the one between our three organizations, will contribute towards a more effective global response to NCDs.”

### **Call for Action**

The joint statement issued today in Geneva was timed to coincide with the meeting of the World Health Assembly. The organizations highlighted their support for the WHO Action Plan and call for the international community to:

1. Ensure the availability of essential medicines for people living with NCDs in low- and middle-income countries
2. Immediately and substantially increase financing for NCDs
3. Integrate NCD prevention into national health systems and the global development agenda
4. Create a Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for NCDs

## 5. Support a UN General Assembly Special Session on NCDs

WHO has shown that simple, cost-effective solutions exist to take on the burgeoning epidemic of NCDs. If the international community acts now, hundreds of millions of lives could be saved and the quality of life improved for millions more. Such action would bring the international community closer to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals. Failure to act will have a detrimental effect on healthcare systems and economies worldwide. Governments who invest in prevention now will be spared the overwhelming costs of chronic care later.

Professor Martin Silink, President of the International Diabetes Federation explains: “the world has not previously had to cope with an epidemic of NCDs. Health systems will need to adapt fast to mobilize new and existing resources to tackle the epidemic through prevention and education. The majority of people with non-communicable diseases like diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer are responsible for most of their own care most of the time. Health systems will need to support the role of people with NCDs and see them as part of the solution.”

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### ***Note to Editors***

#### **About IDF**

The **International Diabetes Federation (IDF)** is an umbrella organization of over 200 member associations in more than 160 countries, representing over 250 million people with diabetes, their families, and their healthcare providers. The mission of IDF is to promote diabetes care, prevention and a cure worldwide. For more information visit [www.idf.org](http://www.idf.org)

#### **About UICC**

**The International Union Against Cancer (UICC)** unites 335 member organizations in 105 countries in the global fight against cancer. It is the leading international non-governmental organization dedicated exclusively to the global control of cancer. UICC is working towards a vision of a dynamic global community of connected cancer control organizations, professionals and volunteers working together to eliminate cancer as a major life-threatening disease for future generations. For more information please visit our website: [www.uicc.org](http://www.uicc.org)

#### **About WHF**

**The World Heart Federation (WHF)** is a nongovernmental organization committed to helping the global population achieve a longer and better life through prevention and control of heart disease and stroke, with a focus on low- and middle-income countries. WHF membership is comprised of 198 medical societies and heart foundations in more than 100 countries. For more information please visit our website: [www.worldheart.org](http://www.worldheart.org)