

The next health tsunami: Non-communicable diseases

GENEVA, Switzerland, 8 July 2009 - The International Diabetes Federation (IDF), the International Union Against Cancer (UICC) and the World Heart Federation (WHF) called today on the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to take immediate action to avert the fastest growing threat by non-communicable diseases (NCDs) to global health.

NCDs which include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory disease, cause 60% of all deaths globally and 80% of these are in low- and middle-income countries. WHO projects that globally NCD deaths will increase by 17% over the next 10 years. The greatest increase will be seen in the African region (27%) and the Eastern Mediterranean region (25%). The highest absolute number of deaths will occur in the W. Pacific and S.E. Asia regions. The global call, issued by the three organizations at the meeting of the UN ECOSOC in Geneva, demands five essential actions:

1. Call for an 'MDG Plus' containing NCD progress indicators in the 2010 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) review
2. Support the availability of essential medicines for people living with NCDs
3. Support a UN General Assembly Special Session on NCDs
4. Support the immediate and substantial increase of funding for NCDs
5. Integrate NCD prevention into national health systems and the global development agenda

The UN MDGs state that health is critical to the economic, political and social development of all countries, yet they contain no goals or targets for NCDs, which are the largest threat to health systems.

Public health experts are expecting ECOSOC leaders to show the way in confronting this health crisis faced by millions. The emerging epidemic of NCDs is threatening to overwhelm healthcare systems worldwide unless action is taken.

"This tsunami didn't arise yesterday; it evolved over time and is getting worse. We need a revolution to change the trajectory if we are serious," stated Dr Leslie Ramsammy, Minister of Health, Guyana at this morning's WHO Ministerial breakfast meeting. The World Economic Forum's 2009 Global Risks report supports this with evidence that the incidence of chronic disease is rising across both the developed and developing world. Medical advances and awareness can reduce the risk severity but chronic non-communicable diseases are still the main cause of death worldwide.

Evidence shows that up to 80% of NCDs can be prevented by addressing risk factors like unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and tobacco use and those that are non-preventable can be treated inexpensively with essential medicines. While medicines such as aspirin, penicillin, insulin and morphine have been on the Essential Medicines List for years, they still remain beyond the reach of many.

The three NGOs request that the final declaration of the ECOSOC High Level Segment include a call for NCD indicators to be included in the 2010 review of the MDGs to form an 'MDG Plus', as this fast emerging global threat has not, to date, been addressed.

The three organizations together represent 730 member organizations in over 170 countries and vast networks of health care professionals, patient, and civil society organizations. They have joined forces to create a powerful voice for change and urge ECOSOC to take action in the face of the NCD epidemic.

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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

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

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

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