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United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization

Press release
23 September 2004

Unesco and World Heart Federation hand in hand to celebrate World Heart Day

World Heart Day, this year to be held on **Sunday 26th September 2004**, will focus on "Children, Adolescents and Heart Disease". With globalisation and urbanisation, children worldwide are increasingly adopting unhealthy lifestyles such as poor diets, smoking and physical inactivity. These behaviours are major risk factors for heart disease and stroke. Students' health and nutrition status affect their enrolment, retention, and absenteeism and is therefore a crucial issue in efforts towards reaching the goal of Education for All. According to a new publication from UNESCO, investing in school-based health and nutrition programmes results in tangible benefits, including among other things, better learning in school and better educational outcomes as well as enhanced equity and contribution to youth development¹.

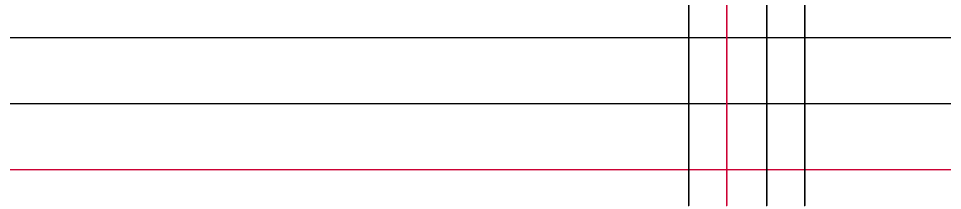
This is why for the fifth World Heart Day, in around 100 countries, member organizations of the World Heart Federation and Member States of UNESCO will organise health education activities targeting children and adolescents. "Healthy, well-nourished and motivated students are a pre-requisite for learning, and skills-based health education is an integral part of quality education," said the Director-General of UNESCO, Koïchiro Matsuura "Initiatives such as World Heart Day should be supported and developed worldwide".

UNESCO is a sponsor of the event and has sent the World Heart Day leaflet "Children and teenagers need a heart for life" to the 7300 schools in the Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet). The material distributed will be the basis for discussions in classes

¹ EFA flagship initiatives, UNESCO, 2004.



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regarding unhealthy choices. It will also encourage decision-makers in schools to serve healthy meals and increase physical education in the curriculum.

“Obesity is increasing globally among children,” said Philip Poole-Wilson, President of the World Heart Federation. “The most effective approach for changing this trend is to educate children with life-long healthy eating habits and increasing physical activity”. The risks for cardiovascular disease start in youth: worldwide, 18 million children under five years old are overweight, and 14 per cent of 13 to 15-year-old students around the world currently smoke cigarettes².

During World Heart Day, member societies of cardiology and heart foundations worldwide will organise festivals promoting healthy eating, professional health counselling, and events to encourage increased physical exercise such as swimming, jogging, cycling, roller-skating, skipping, dancing, aerobic demonstrations and football matches.

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About the World Heart Federation

The World Heart Federation, a non-governmental organization based in Geneva, Switzerland, is committed to helping the global population achieve a longer and better life through prevention and control of heart disease and stroke, with a particular focus on low and middle-income countries. It is comprised of 180 member societies of cardiology and heart foundations from 100 countries covering the regions of Asia-Pacific, Europe, East Mediterranean, the Americas and Africa. For further information visit: www.worldheart.org

About UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was founded on 16 November 1945. For this specialized United Nations agency, it is not enough to build classrooms in devastated countries or to publish scientific breakthroughs. Education, the Social and Natural Sciences, Culture and Communications are the means to a far more ambitious goal: to build peace in the minds of men.

² The Atlas of Heart Disease and Stroke, J Mackay, G Mensah. WHO, CDC. 2004.

