

## **WHF Statement on Agenda Item 9 – Regional Strategy for the Management of Environmental Determinants of Human Health in the African Region 2017-2021**

Honourable chair, distinguished delegates,

The World Heart Federation welcomes the Committee's report, and its recognition of the urgent need to monitor and address the environmental determinants of health.

We commend the inclusion of multisectoral task teams, sustainable financing and robust surveillance systems as core elements of the strategy, to ensure that environmental determinants such as climate change are addressed in a comprehensive and integrated way.

We further commend its reference to the impact of the environment on non-communicable diseases (or 'NCDs'): globally, 8.2 million deaths from NCDs each year are linked to environmental causes.<sup>1</sup>

Environmental risk factors such as air pollution and tobacco smoke also account for 31% of cardiovascular diseases (or 'CVDs'),<sup>2</sup> while stroke and ischaemic heart disease are the two conditions most linked to environmental causes.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, environmental risk factors such as rapid urbanization, poor hygiene and household overcrowding increase the risk of rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease in the region.

Tackling NCDs and protecting the environment are among the defining challenges of this century, and both have the potential to reverse public health and development gains achieved in recent decades if we do not address them.

However governments can take great strides to improve human health and the environment by forging partnerships and implementing cost-effective interventions with co-benefit solutions. These include creating sustainable health food systems, reducing air pollution, and investment in infrastructure and security that supports active transport and free open-air exercise in community parks.

To address CVD and NCDs, and to support implementation of the Regional Strategy and Libreville Declaration, we make the following recommendations:

- 1. Include NCD representatives in multisectoral country task teams.**
- 2. Increase resources allocated to health systems strengthening at the primary health care level.** Strengthening primary care can both improve health outcomes and provide a basis for integrated health and environment surveillance systems.
- 3. Pursue climate change funding opportunities for interventions that improve both health and the environment.** The health sector currently receives less than 1.5% of climate change funding;<sup>4</sup> however there is a compelling case to invest in co-benefit interventions.

We reiterate our support to Member States in their implementation of the Regional Strategy for the management of environmental determinants of health.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Maria Neira, (WHO Director, Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health); *WHO Technical Briefing – Health and the environment: Inheriting a Sustainable World.*

<sup>2</sup> Regional Strategy for the Management of Environmental Determinants of Human Health in the African Region 2017-2021, *Report by the Secretariat*

<sup>3</sup> Dr Maria Neira, (WHO Director, Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health); *WHO Technical Briefing – Health and the environment: Inheriting a Sustainable World.*

<sup>4</sup> Dr Maria Neira, (WHO Director, Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health); *WHO Technical Briefing – Health and the environment: Inheriting a Sustainable World*