



Tel. direct: +41 22 791 5526
Fax direct: +41 22 791
E-mail :

In reply please
refer to:

Your reference:

Climate Change Secretariat
United Nations Framework Convention
on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
P. O. Box 260 124
53153 Bonn
Allemagne

15 MAI 2010

Dear UNFCCC Secretariat,

The World Health Organization (WHO) would like to congratulate Mrs Margaret M. Mukahanana Sangarwe on her appointment as Chair of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long Term Cooperative Action under the Convention.

Moreover, WHO welcomes the opportunity to express ideas and suggestions to the AWG-LCA to be taken in consideration in the text the Chair is drafting to facilitate negotiations among Parties at COP16.

Please find our submission attached.

Yours sincerely,

Dr M. Neira
Director
Public Health and Environment

Encl.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION SUBMISSION TO THE CHAIR OF THE TENTH SESSION OF THE AWG-LCA

The World Health Organization (WHO) welcomes the opportunity to express ideas and suggestions to the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long Term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA) to be taken in consideration in the text that the Chair is drafting to facilitate negotiations among Parties at COP16.

In order to facilitate a renewed commitment of the countries and of the international community, WHO recognizes the need to improve information dissemination and awareness raising at all levels on issues of critical importance for the populations in the world, such as the environmental and social impacts of climate change and particularly the impacts on health. We are convinced that a better understanding of these consequences of climate change would constitute a powerful motivator for countries, decision makers and the public to support the necessary actions to address this problem.

With this in mind, we would like to stress four key policy messages which we encourage the Chair of the AWG-LCA to support to help making this agenda progress.

1. Besides environmental and economic damage, the ultimate impact of climate change represents a toll on our most precious resource - human lives and health

Environmental and economic impacts affect people in an unequal manner. It is the poor, and those most dependent on their immediate environment to survive, the ones that are affected first, and the hardest. In addition, adverse effects of climate change have a range of direct and indirect implications for health and well being thus jeopardizing the enjoyment of one fundamental human right, the right to health. The economic and social transition that is needed to address climate change should not be seen as a painful economic cost, but as a valuable investment in a more sustainable, fairer and healthier future.

2. Mitigation policies in sectors such as energy, transport and agriculture may bring significant benefits for population health and well-being

Many of the economic and social changes which are necessary to address climate change could also bring very large public health benefits. For example, cleaner energy would not only reduce harmful emissions, but save hundreds of thousand lives per year. Similarly, shifting to more sustainable urban transport, through a larger use of public and active modes, would be expected to reduce cardiovascular diseases by 10-25% in both developed and developing cities, and bring similar cuts in a number of other diseases ranging from dementia to breast cancer. Such benefits are not only immediate and local, making them attractive to policy makers and the public, but their economic returns would partly or completely offset the costs of mitigation.

3. The health sector will bear most of the burden resulting from the impacts of climate change on populations and it will play a critical role in relation to adaptation and resilience

In the short to medium term, better health systems could protect people from the health impacts of climate change, and at the same time bring immediate health improvements. Proven, cost-effective interventions, ranging from heatwave warning systems, to access to improved water and sanitation and vector control, could save millions of lives now and in the future. Resources should be made available through climate change financing mechanisms to health systems, to improve resilience of human populations to climate change health impacts.

4. The health sector, being one of the most important energy intensive sectors, can play a significant role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions

The health sector can play a leadership role in mitigating climate change - that is reducing its emissions and contribution to climate change and at the same time create a series of health, economic and social benefits. This will add a new role to the traditional one of delivering of quality health care. Hospitals are

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energy- and resource-intensive enterprises that, as they operate today, contribute substantially to GHG emissions causing climate change. As a consequence of this, hospitals may be seen as indirect contributors to the incidence of climate change related health effects such as, for example respiratory and other illnesses due to air pollution. Procurement, resource use, transportation and other policies and practices contribute to the health sector's significant carbon footprint. By reducing this footprint and moving towards carbon neutrality, the health sector can show leadership in advocating for a healthy and sustainable future.

WHO PROPOSAL FOR THE CHAIR TEXT

I. A SHARED VISION FOR LONG-TERM COOPERATIVE ACTION

- The shared vision section should stress both health protection and achievement of health co-benefits, as a primary justification for action on climate change. Such emphasis on local and immediate health gains should aid political and public support for action.

II. ENHANCED ACTION ON ADAPTATION AND ITS MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

- Adaptation section should state protection of human health and wellbeing, as a primary aim of adaptation measures, and list the health sector alongside sectors such as agriculture, water and coastal zones, as priorities for adaptation support. This will promote the relevance of adaptation actions to the general population, and support most the vulnerable populations.

III. ENHANCED ACTION ON MITIGATION

- The mitigation section should emphasize that mitigation measures can bring immediate socioeconomic (mainly health) co-benefits, and that this should be taken into account when selecting mitigation measures.

IV. ENHANCED ACTION ON THE PROVISION OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND INVESTMENT

- The finance and technology section should specify that support for adaptation and mitigation measures, should aim to protect and, wherever possible, improve health. This will ensure better alignment between climate, development and health objectives, increasing long-term sustainability.