



Joint WHO UNEP COP22 news update
15 November 2016

Health and environment ministers pledge climate actions to reduce 12.6 million environment-related deaths

15 November 2016 | MARRAKECH – Ministers and senior officials responsible for health and environment today committed to reducing the annual 12.6 million deaths caused by environmental pollution.

Gathering at the COP22 climate meeting in Marrakech, over two dozen high level officials from both sectors signed up to the *Declaration for Health, Environment and Climate Change*. The goal is to reduce pollution-related deaths via a new global initiative to promote better management of environmental and climate risks to health.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that some 12.6 million deaths a year are associated with environmental pollution. Of these, an estimated 6.5 million deaths (11.6% of all global deaths) are associated with air pollution, from household and outdoor sources.

“This landmark declaration has raised consensus for better articulation of our efforts to find a solution to the major health, environmental and climate challenges,” said Ms Hakima El Haite, Minister of Environment, Morocco. “Together, we commit to ensuring that people – their livelihoods, wellbeing, and particularly their health – are at the centre of the response to climate change.”

The declaration encourages the health and environment sectors to exchange experiences, technical expertise and best practices to enhance health and protect the environment. Global and comprehensive links between these two sectors does not yet exist.

The health impact of environmental pollution

Most environmental pollution-related deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. However, outdoor air pollution remains prevalent in high-income countries as well, with 9 out of 10 people worldwide exposed to air pollution that exceeds WHO Air Quality guidelines for fine particulate matter.

Ninety-four percent of outdoor air pollution deaths are due to noncommunicable diseases – notably cardiovascular diseases, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer. Air pollution also increases the risk for acute respiratory infections. Indoor air pollution in particular causes about half of all childhood pneumonia deaths (about 530 000 childhood deaths in 2012).

Major sources of air pollution include inefficient modes of transport, household fuel and waste burning, coal-fired power plants, and industrial activities.

According to WHO, hundreds of thousands more deaths each year are due to direct climate change impacts including heat waves, extreme weather emergencies, drought, and increased diarrhoeal disease and vector borne disease transmission. And these deaths are projected to rise if climate change is not addressed.

Reducing the risk

“We know that most health risks from climate change are preventable,” said Dr El Houssaine Louardi, Minister of Health, Morocco. “By establishing this initiative we can work together on strengthening health systems, investing in disease prevention, and common-sense measures such as improving water and sanitation systems, and infectious disease surveillance. This will save lives now and protect us from escalating climate risks.”

The Declaration recognizes that well designed policies to protect the environment will result in reducing the global burden of disease attributable to the environment, as well as reducing the rising rate of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), such as stroke, heart disease, cancers and chronic respiratory diseases. NCDs account for nearly two-thirds – or 8.2 million – of deaths associated with unhealthy environments.

“The devastating consequences of air pollution affect both the climate and health. They are seen everywhere from smog-encircled mega-cities to village dwellings filled with smoke from indoor cooking. Yet virtually all air pollution is man-made – and often excessive,” said Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General. “By working together, across sectors, and with partners, we can help ensure that people – their livelihoods, wellbeing, and particularly their health – are at the centre of the response to climate change.”

“Rather than focussing solely on the cure, we need more integrated policies, solutions and measures that prevent environmental degradation and the health problems they cause,” said Erik Solheim, head of UN Environment. “For this we need the environment and health communities to come together. We need to translate global agreements into measures that have a tangible, positive impact on people’s lives.”

“We have the solutions and they are within reach, but we need to see greater political will for positive change to materialize. The coalition that has been called for today offers an important and timely opportunity to catalyse change across multiple sectors, from energy, transport, housing and agriculture to economic policy and planning.”

The health and environment agencies are also linking together in a new campaign, BreatheLife (www.breathelife2030.org), to raise awareness about air pollution, climate and health impacts as well as promote climate solutions beneficial to health.

Web links

The Ministerial Declaration is available on WHO Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health web-site:

In English: <http://www.who.int/globalchange/mediacentre/events/Ministerial-declaration-EN.pdf>

In French: <http://www.who.int/globalchange/mediacentre/events/Ministerial-Declaration-FR.pdf>

UN Environment via <http://web.unep.org/climatechange/cop22/>

For further interviews and information, please contact:

Nada Osseiran, Communications Officer, WHO, Mobile: +41 79 4451624, Email: osseirann@who.int

Nadia Bezat, Conseillère de Madame la Ministre de la Santé et de l'Environnement du Maroc. Mobile +212 661 263 868. Email: nadiabezat@gmail.com.

Sophie Loran, Communications Officer, UNEP. Email: sophie.loran@unep.org. Tel: +33 1 44 3742 83.