

# Cancun climate and health statement

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

There is a growing body of evidence that human-induced climate change is already causing serious human health problems across the globe.

These health impacts will only escalate as the world's climate becomes increasingly destabilized. *The Lancet* has called climate change, “the biggest global health threat of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”<sup>i</sup>.

### Health impacts of climate change include:

1. Increases in heat-related deaths, injury and disability, especially in the elderly, children, pregnant women and those with chronic disease;
2. Deaths and injuries from flooding, with exacerbated negative consequences in developing countries;
3. Migration of plants and pollens causing prolonged allergy season and new allergies;
4. The spread of infectious and vector-borne diseases such as dengue fever, malaria, schistosomiasis, and Lyme disease as a result of warming temperatures at expanding latitudes and elevations;
5. Increased hazards from sewage and chemical pollution;
6. Climate-change induced famines and malnutrition;
7. Exacerbation of water- and food-borne diseases.<sup>ii</sup>

Overall, climate change will increasingly impact the health of people in industrialized countries<sup>iii</sup>, while threatening to exacerbate “diseases of poverty” in developing countries, undermining efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals<sup>iv</sup>.

**There is also powerful evidence showing<sup>vii</sup> that taking action to mitigate climate change can in itself provide major benefits for health and the economy.** Indeed, moving to a low carbon economy by reducing greenhouse gas emission could be the next great public health advance<sup>vii</sup>. For example, emission reductions in the transport sector would require substantial increases in walking and cycling, with corresponding reductions in car use. The resulting increased physical activity would lead to less obesity and chronic disease.

These "co-benefits" of climate policy will also come about from cleaner air associated with reduced emissions from industry and transport. This is because falls in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions produce falls in air pollutants, which are a major contributor to ill-health globally.

A recent European-based study<sup>viii</sup> has assessed the additional benefits for health if the European Union achieved a 30% domestic reduction in GHGs, as opposed to the current 20% target . This public health benefit is estimated at up to €30.5 billion per year in 2020. The monetary value is based on a calculation of the benefits associated with avoiding cardiac and respiratory disease, including bronchitis and asthma, due to exposure to air pollution.

The same study evidence shows that the co-benefit of climate change policy are likely to be 250% higher if action on climate change takes place immediately.

Populations in other industrialized regions of the world could benefit from similar reductions in GHGs.

### **We call on delegates at the international climate change talks in Cancun (COP/MOP16) to:**

- take into account the significant human health dimensions of the climate crisis along with the health benefits of climate change mitigation and adaptation policies
- ensure that a portion of climate mitigation and adaptation funds is targeted for the health sector
- institute measures to update evidence of the health impacts of climate change
- continue to promote solutions to the climate crisis that move away from coal, oil, gas, nuclear power, waste incineration and fossil-fuel-intensive agriculture
- view adaptation and mitigation support to developing countries as an opportunity to promote public health and tackle "diseases of poverty."

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Dr. Radziwell, President



**World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA)**

Dr. Ulrich Laaser, President



**World Medical Association (WMA)**

Dr. Wonchat Subhachaturas, President



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<sup>i</sup> The Lancet. 2009. Managing the health effects of climate change, 13 May 2009  
<http://www.thelancet.com/climate-change> (accessed 22 November 2010)

<sup>ii</sup> Protecting health from climate change, World Health Day 2008, World Health Organization,  
[http://www.who.int/world-health-day/toolkit/report\\_web.pdf](http://www.who.int/world-health-day/toolkit/report_web.pdf) (accessed 22 November 2010)

<sup>iii</sup> Sunyer, J (2010). Geographical differences on the mortality impact of heat waves in Europe. *Environmental Health* 9.38,  
<http://www.ehjurnal.net/content/pdf/1476-069>

<sup>iv</sup> Protecting health from climate change, World Health Day 2008, World Health Organization,  
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<sup>v</sup> Stern, N. 2007. *The Economics of Climate Change. The Stern Review*. Cambridge University Press.  
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<sup>vi</sup> *The Lancet series on Economics of Climate Change*. (published online) November 25, 2009.  
<http://www.thelancet.com/series/health-and-climate-change>

<sup>vii</sup> Doctors and climate change, Editorial, *BMJ* 2010; 341:c6357 doi: 10.1136/bmj.c6357 (Published 17 November 2010) *BMJ* 2010; 341:c6357

<sup>viii</sup> Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) and Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL). September, 2010. Acting NOW for Better Health, A 30% Reduction Target for EU Climate Policy  
[http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/HEAL\\_30\\_co-benefits\\_report\\_-\\_FULL.pdf](http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/HEAL_30_co-benefits_report_-_FULL.pdf)  
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