Every year on April 7, the World Health Organization celebrates World Health Day to commemorate the coming into force of the Constitution of the Organization on April 7, 1948. This year, the theme for World Health Day is:

“HEALTHY CITIES FOR BETTER LIFE”

WHO has chosen this theme because of the dramatic growth of cities since the beginning of this century. Back in 1900, one person in ten lived in a city. By 1948, the proportion was three in ten. And by the year 2000 over half the world’s population will be “urbanites”. A second reason for this theme is the impact urban growth is having on the health of city dwellers. In developing countries, for example, more than 600 million urban dwellers are living in conditions that threaten their health, even their lives.

A MAJOR THREAT TO HEALTH

Within 15 years, 20-30 cities will have over 20 million people – slightly more than the population of Australia today. As cities grow, so does their adverse impact on health. Cholera, malnutrition, mental illness, accidents and chronic respiratory infections thrive in an unhealthy urban setting.

HEALTHY CITY PROJECTS WORK

Around the world, healthy city projects have shown that it is possible to improve life in cities, particularly among the poorest population groups. These projects forge a new partnership between municipal authorities and the people – a partnership aimed at tackling urban problems. Through this partnership it has been possible, for example, to introduce into industrial development or house renewal schemes worker training in safe work practices and pollution control, primary health care services, better sanitation and health education.

THE HEALTHY CITY MOVEMENT

Cities share many problems – too much traffic and noise, pollution, inadequate and insufficient housing, inequitable access to health care or basic needs such as food, water, sanitation and energy. But cities also share the same potential to become healthier. To encourage them to realize this potential is the aim of the WHO’s Healthy City Programme, which started in Europe in 1986 and has become international, with projects on every continent.

TOWARDS A GLOBAL NETWORK

WHO has asked 1000 cities throughout the world to make World Health Day 1996 a year-long event and together to create a truly global movement, a truly global network.

For further information about World Health Day, please contact:

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