

## Busan Pledge for Action on Children's Health and the Environment

Evidence is increasing that environmental degradation, harmful chemicals, radiation and global climate change pose major threats to the health, development and survival of the world's children. Annually more than three million children under five years die from preventable environment-related effects, such as diarrhoeal diseases, respiratory infections, malaria and other vector-borne diseases. Moreover, children throughout the world are exposed to a complex array of environmental threats as new risk factors emerge in the context of global changes. The increased production, use and prevalence of harmful chemicals, unsafe disposal of hazardous waste, worsening air and water pollution, poor access to sanitation and hygiene, unexpected effects of some new technologies and the effects of climate change, all have significant negative health impacts. Action is needed to protect the health of the children of today and the adults of the future.

To address these urgent issues, over 600 health and environment researchers, scientists, practitioners and policy-makers from 60 countries, met in June 2009 in Busan, the Republic of Korea. The purpose was to draw renewed and urgent attention to children's environmental health (CEH) issues, reposition CEH in the global public health agenda, and improve and promote practical protective policies and actions at all levels. The following are the major findings, conclusions and recommendations of the conference participants:

- We acknowledge:
  - chronic and acute health risks associated with children's exposure to mercury, lead, arsenic, pesticides, persistent organic/toxic pollutants and industrial chemicals, and to vectors of disease;
  - the global threat to children posed by climate change, including through increased air pollution, elevated temperature extremes, weather-related disasters, increased infectious disease, loss of biodiversity, degradation of ecosystems, desertification, growing lack of sufficient food supplies and inadequate access to clean water;
  - magnification of these risks in many parts of the world due to the combined impacts of genetic susceptibility, disease, malnutrition and poverty;
  - the lack of knowledge regarding potential health impacts of manufactured products such as nanoparticles and other new synthetic products;
  - physical threats posed by the inappropriate and/or excessive use of radiation in health care;
  - the relation between the built environment (i.e. the range of physical and social elements that make up the structure of a community) and childhood obesity.
- We acknowledge with concern that old and new environmental threats may coexist in homes, schools, playgrounds, health-care settings and other places where children spend time.
- We acknowledge the value and importance of relevant international agreements and policy frameworks, including the upcoming negotiation for a mercury convention, in which consideration is given to the unique vulnerability of children.
- We commend the renewed call of commitment to CEH by the G8 Environment Ministers' meeting held in Siracusa, Italy (April 2009) on research collaboration, children's environmental health protection policies, indicators and programmes, climate change, increased attention to children's health and paediatric environmental health units, as well as the importance assigned to

collaboration between health and environment groups in order to ensure the promotion and protection of children's environmental health.

- We recognize the existing obstacles to protecting children's health from environmental threats, including:
  - lack of awareness and understanding of the effects of the environment on human health, and the differences in exposure and health effects for children compared to adults;
  - numerous research gaps and lack of coordination of research efforts across countries and disciplines;
  - poor links and collaboration between health, environment and various policy-making sectors;
  - lack of education and capacity-building on children's environmental health issues for health-care providers;
  - limited practical and accessible scientific information for policy-makers and communities who are concerned about the environment and their children's health.
  
- We recognize that although much progress has been made, much more needs to be done to decrease the impact of environmental hazards on child health and survival. The environmental exposures of many children can be reduced or eliminated because we have: (i) a significant body of knowledge on the unique susceptibility of children; (ii) the tools and mechanisms available to increase this body of knowledge and address key issues; (iii) existing and emerging partnerships at various levels; and (iv) regional and international agreements outlining policy frameworks and purposeful action steps.
  
- We reaffirm the outcomes of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference on Children's Health and the Environment (Bangkok, Thailand, 2002), which clearly outlined the main *Environmental Threats to the Health of Children: Hazards and Vulnerability*, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2005), which addressed the need for *Increasing Knowledge for Taking Action*. Our focus at this 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference was on the need to increase international collaboration to move with urgency to translate research results, new knowledge and international agreements into concrete political commitments and stronger practical implementation.

As organizations and individual participants, we are committed to providing and improving healthy environments for children. We pledge to translate existing research and knowledge into preventive policies and protective actions and to strengthen our efforts, and hereby commit to:

1. **Advocate for the recognition, assessment and consideration of hazardous environmental influences on children's health and development;**
2. **Contribute to raising the political profile of children's environmental health locally nationally, regionally and internationally;**
3. **Raise awareness about global climate change, green growth and children's environmental health synergies;**
4. **Train, educate and inform children, parents and key stakeholders at all levels (including health-care workers, environment professionals, nongovernmental organizations, industry and policy-makers) about children's health and the environment;**
5. **Integrate children's environmental health into existing public health programmes, especially into primary health care programmes, regional initiatives, international conventions and other programmes that address children and their environments;**
6. **Develop and strengthen specialized children's environmental health centres in order to prevent, diagnose, manage and treat environment-related illnesses and conditions;**

7. Encourage collaborative CEH research studies that create new knowledge, incorporating biomarkers of environmental exposure and related health effects;
8. Advance the development of children's environmental health indicators. Ideally, these should be an expression of the link between environment and health, targeted at an issue of specific policy or management concern and presented in a form that facilitates effective decision-making;
9. Evaluate and document the efficacy of CEH-related interventions taken to date;
10. Establish dedicated partnerships and networks on CEH issues as a platform for improving health and the environment;
11. Strengthen communication among CEH stakeholders as an integral component of advancing progress, creating new channels and engaging the media in raising awareness about and championing children's environmental health issues;
12. Develop innovative funding mechanisms and opportunities that incorporate the environment into major health, development, education, housing and welfare projects, and into the context of international conventions, in order to promote and facilitate country implementation of CEH activities.

We pledge to develop a *Global Plan of Action* to improve CEH, and regularly monitor and report on its progress. We urge the World Health Organization (WHO) and its partners to facilitate the development of this plan in collaboration with all relevant agencies, governments and other institutions.

We will implement the *Global Plan of Action* in close and interactive partnership with governmental and nongovernmental organizations, centres of excellence, academia, professional bodies, educators and other relevant stakeholders.

We commit to bring CEH issues to the consideration of the highest authorities in our respective countries and to the attention of international agencies concerned about children's health and the environment, and the needs for green growth and sustainability.

We recognize and gratefully acknowledge the Republic of Korea as the host of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Children's Health and the Environment.

*Drafted collectively by participants on 10 June 2009  
Busan, the Republic of Korea*