

**Media update
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THE ASTURIAS PLEDGE – A NEW CALL TO ACTION ON ENVIRONMENTAL AND OCCUPATIONAL CANCER PREVENTION

GIJÓN, Spain, 18 March 2011 –Today at an international scientific meeting, convened by the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 100 leading experts on cancer, environment, and occupational and public health joined together with representatives from policy, research and non-governmental organizations to release the Asturias Pledge. Named after the Spanish Principality in which the meeting was held, this new call to action addresses the known and preventable environmental and occupational causes of cancer, and identifies required policies to reverse the trend of their occurrence.

Globally, roughly 19 per cent of all cancers are attributable to the environment, including work settings, resulting in 1.3 million deaths each year.

"Many environmental and occupational factors, including certain chemicals, radiation and airborne particles, can cause cancer," said Dr Maria Neira, Director for Public Health and Environment at WHO. "These cancers could be prevented and reduced by changes in national and international policy to limit people's involuntary exposure to these substances."

The causes of these cancers are often the areas which individual people have limited control over such as the quality of the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the level of chemical contamination in indoor and outdoor environments and at the workplace.

The Asturias Pledge calls on:

- Governments to include environmental and occupational preventive measures as part of national cancer control programmes, and ensure intense application of national and international standards for environmental and occupational carcinogens;
- The World Health Organization to lead a global effort in highlighting the importance of primary prevention of cancer, assess the impact of environmental and occupational interventions on primary prevention of cancer, develop guidance for implementation of evidence-based interventions, and establish a network of national and international institutions for policy development and implementation of primary prevention measures;

- Civil society networks to raise awareness about practices and processes that increase carcinogenic risks, raise awareness, educate and advocate for funding to implement effective primary prevention of environmental and occupational related cancers; and
- Industry and the private sector to support and implement measures aimed at preventing environmental and occupational-related cancer and research; contribute to policy development relating to the mitigation of occupational risks and workers' exposures; eliminate or reduce exposure to known and probable carcinogens, and better inform workers on the risks they face in the workplace and protect them from carcinogens.

"Creating a safe and healthy work environment is one of the biggest challenges facing governments in the area of health protection policy." said Leire Pajín Iraola, Spanish Minister of Health, Social Policy and Equality. "This issue should be dealt with by taking an approach that is intersectoral, multifactorial, comprehensive and evidence-based. Not only must we take steps to avoid the risks associated with exposure to carcinogens, we must also develop policies that promote healthy habits in the workplace, such as physical activity and healthy diet. It is also important to avoid the principal risk factors for workers' health, for example by controlling specific environmental conditions at work and creating smoke-free enclosed spaces."

"Holding this conference in Asturias will enable us to show the world how, with an ambitious political vision and the support of citizens and businesses, it is possible to overcome in a very short time the negative environmental impacts of twentieth century industrialization and to transform ourselves into a territory committed like no other to environmental protection and better public health," said, Mr Vicente Álvarez Areces, President of the Principality of Asturias.

Decreasing, and eventually eliminating the exposure to environmental and occupational carcinogens is the most effective way to prevent a number of cancers. By stopping the use of asbestos, it is possible to prevent lung cancer, mesothelioma and cancers of the larynx and ovaries. Replacement of benzene with safer solvents will prevent leukemia.

"The World Cancer Declaration calls for a concerted, cross-sectorial approach to address cancer and cancer risk factors, said Eduardo Cazap, President of the Union of International Cancer Control (UICC). "The UICC membership is committed not only to raising awareness but also to working with both governments and private enterprises to implement change to reduce exposure to environmental cancer risks that we encounter in our everyday lives."

The identification of gaps and barriers will now help define a road map to better address the environmental and occupational determinants of cancer, to develop a range of proposals for primary prevention of cancer and to introduce environmental and occupational aspects into the global cancer agenda.

Notes to editors:

The first International Conference on Environmental and Occupational Determinants of Cancer: Interventions for Primary Prevention takes place in Asturias, Spain from 17-18 March 2011. The conference was organized by WHO in collaboration with the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the Union for International Cancer Control and the Fundación Sandra Ibarra de Solidaridad Frente al Cáncer. The conference was hosted by the Ministry of Health, Social Policy and Equality and the Government of the Principality of Asturias, Spain.

A pre-final version of *The Asturias Pledge* is available on the WHO Public Health and Environment website www.who.int/phe and at http://www.who.int/phe/news/events/international_conference/en/index.html

The final version will be available on the web-site shortly.

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All WHO information can be found at : www.who.int