



# INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EPIDEMIOLOGY

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Francine Laden, Sc.D., *President*  
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January 9, 2015

Dr Margaret Chan  
Director-General  
World Health Organization  
Avenue Appia 20  
1211 Geneva 27  
Switzerland

Chairman, Executive Board  
World Health Organization  
Avenue Appia 20  
1211 Geneva 27  
Switzerland

Dear Dr. Chan and Chairman, WHO Executive Board:

I am writing on behalf of the International Society for Environmental Epidemiology (ISEE) in support to the development of the World Health Assembly (WHA) Resolution on Air Quality and Health. In view of the significance of indoor and outdoor air pollution as one of the leading risk factors to global health, such a Resolution is long overdue. It will express the essential call from health community to mobilize the Member States to take comprehensive and effective actions to combat the pollution and its root causes.

According to the accumulated and constantly growing research evidence, air pollution, at levels commonly observed in all parts of the world, causes lung cancers, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and affects child development. It creates burden to health comparable with other major well-established causes of non-communicable disease, as shown by the Global Burden of Disease studies. Much of this research is conducted by the scientists who are the members of our Society, so we are fully aware of its significance and high quality. Systematic review of this research has been completed by various scientific groups as well as by IARC and WHO. WHO Air Quality Guidelines, formulated on the basis of these reviews, define basic parameters of air quality necessary for substantial reduction of the health risks associated with the exposure. They give clear goals to the countries aiming at improvement of health.

In some regions of the world, this evidence has already prompted the actions reducing air pollution and improving population health and wellbeing. However, in predominant part of the world, and in particular in developing countries, indoor and outdoor air pollution still causes unacceptable burden to health. WHO estimate of 7 million of deaths per year attributed to indoor and outdoor pollution emitted mostly by human activities in energy production, transport, agriculture and industry is an indisputable argument for the global action. We specifically want to emphasize the major adverse health impact from biomass and coal household fuel use in rural areas of less developed countries. According to the OECD, the costs of health impacts of

outdoor air pollution alone amounted to 1.7 trillion USD in 2010. However, this health cost of pollution is often ignored in discussions and plans focussed on short term economic goals.

The call of the health sector, to be voiced by the WHA Resolution, will support the UN Environment Assembly Resolution UNEP/EA.1/L.5 and will empower health ministries in taking a stronger position on national actions to combat pollution and select clean development solutions. It should also encourage regional collaboration to address transboundary long-range air pollution and increasing the effectiveness of local actions. It will supplement the actions covered by the UN strategy for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (UN Resolution A/RES/66/2) and contribute to the efforts to reduce human impacts on global climate, since many of the health-relevant air pollutants are short lived climate forcers. Moreover, many air pollutants remain in the atmosphere for days to weeks, during which time they are transported across national boundaries and cause health effects in the downwind locations. This makes it particularly important that an international organization such as WHO take a strong stand on addressing this issue.

We expect that the WHO support to the Member States in their actions to implement the planned WHA Resolution will include new updates of its Air Quality Guidelines and their comprehensive promotion in the Member States. Systematic update and maintenance of WHO global data base on air quality and of estimates of burden of disease due to air pollution will help countries in monitoring the effects of their actions. WHO recommended methods for assessment of health impact of pollution, including improved monitoring of population exposure to main air pollutants, introduced in the Member States, will increase their ability to plan and evaluate their own actions to reduce the pollution. Such monitoring is particularly needed in the developing countries, where local data on air pollution and its health impacts are very scarce. The leadership and assistance of WHO should mobilize the resources existing in the developing countries, as well as international collaboration supporting it, for pollution reduction and demonstration of the improvement of health related to it.

ISEE declares its readiness to contribute to these essential tasks of WHO and the Member States with the research conducted by its members and with their expertise. We are looking forward to strong and comprehensive resolution, expecting that its implementation will significantly benefit health of people.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Francine Laden". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Francine Laden, ScD  
President, International Society for Environmental Epidemiology