

Busan Pledge for Action on Children's Health and Environment

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Evidence is increasing that environmental degradation; toxic chemicals and global climate change pose major threats to the health, development and survival of the world's children. Annually more than 3 million children under 5 years die from preventable environment-related causes. In children, the largest burden of disease attributable to environmental factors is caused by diarrhoeal diseases, lower respiratory infections, and malaria and other vector-borne diseases. Moreover, children throughout the world are exposed to a complex array of environmental risks that are increasing and compounded by old and new risk factors including: increased production, use and movement of harmful chemicals, and disposal of hazardous wastes, increasing air pollution, new technology and epidemiology, and the effects of global climate change, all of which have significant and dire health impacts.

To address these urgent issues over 600 participants from 60 countries and 223 national and international organizations, a body of health and environment researchers, scientists, practitioners and policy-makers, met in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 7 to 10 June 2009. The mission of the global conference was to draw renewed and urgent attention to children's environmental health (CEH) issues, reposition CEH in the global public health agenda, improve and promote practical protective policies and actions at all levels. The following are our major findings, conclusions and recommendations:

Acknowledging the traditional and new concerns raised by children's exposure to mercury, lead, arsenic, pesticides, persistent organic/ toxic pollutants, industrial chemicals, potential effects of manufactured products such as nanoparticles and new synthetic products; physical threats such as the inappropriate use of radiation in health care, challenges associated with the built environment including obesity. The effects of these exposures may be magnified due to a genetic susceptibility and may be further compounded by infections, behaviours, malnutrition and poverty.

Acknowledging that old and new threats are present in homes, schools, playgrounds, health care and other settings where children spend time

Realizing the importance of green growth requiring the resolution of energy and environmental problems, changes in social, national and international systems as well as in individual lifestyles to protect health and the environment.

Recalling and reaffirming the outcomes of the 1st International Conference on Children's Health and the Environment (Bangkok, Thailand in 2002) which clearly outlined the main 'Environmental Threats to the Health of Children: Hazards and Vulnerability' and the 2nd International Conference on Children's Health and the Environment (Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2005), which addressed the need for 'Increasing Knowledge for Taking Action.' Focusing at this 3rd International Conference on Children's Health and Environment (Busan, Korea, June 2009) on the need to increase international collaboration to move with vigour to translate

research results, new knowledge and international agreements, into concrete political commitments and stronger practical policies for action.

Acknowledging the value of existing international agreements and policy frameworks, including the upcoming negotiation for a mercury convention where consideration is given to the unique vulnerability of children. An environmentally protective consideration is given to children as especially vulnerable groups, as platform for action, including in particular those developed by the World Health Organization and United Nations Environmental Program.

Recognizing the renewed call of commitment to CEH made by the G8 Environment Ministerial Meeting held in Siracusa Italy (April 2009) on research collaboration, children's environmental health protection policies and programmes, climate change and increased attention to children's health and paediatric environmental health units. Reaffirming that collaboration between the health and environment centres is essential to ensure the promotion and protection of children's environmental health.

Realizing the existing obstacles for advancing the CEH agenda nationally and internationally including: unawareness about the adverse impacts of old and new, emerging environmental risk factors, research gaps and poor coordination of efforts across sectors and across countries, lack of access to up-to-date training, as well as limited communication on and translation of scientific information for policy-makers and communities concerned about their children, especially when their resources are limited.

Recognizing that many environmental threats to children are avoidable and that preventing disease through health environments should be attainable as we have: (i) a significant body of knowledge on children's unique susceptibility; (ii) tools and mechanisms available; (iii) partnerships initiated at various levels; and (iv) regional and international agreements for concrete actions

Stressing that although much progress has been made, much more remains to be urgently done to address the unacceptable and largely preventable toll on child health and survival caused by a complex of environmental threats.

KEY ACTION POINTS

As participants, organizations and individuals committed to providing healthy environments for healthy children we pledge to translate research and knowledge into preventive policies and protective actions to strengthen our efforts jointly to scale up interventions and take action to:

1. Increase advocacy and the recognition, assessment, and consideration of hazardous environmental influences on children's health.
2. Include knowledge children's environmental health into policies aimed at protecting children, such as the National Environmental Health Action Plans (NEHAP) and new processes that address global change and green growth.
3. Contribute to raising the political profile of children's environmental health at the local, national, regional and international level.
4. Strengthen the capacity of health care workers, environment professionals, NGOs, industry, the parents, educators/teachers at all levels and policy-makers.

5. Integrate CEH into existing public health programmes, especially into the primary health care setting and in the settings approach in regional initiatives, conventions and other programmes.
6. Develop and strengthen specialized children's environmental health units and collaborating centres and the networks that inter-connect them in order to provide advice and guidance about relevant health and environment areas for action.
7. Encourage collaborative research studies and inter-sectoral partnerships that will accelerate access to new knowledge and improve joint health, development and environment interventions.
8. Develop a communications among stakeholders as an integral component to advancing progress and engage the media in these efforts
9. Develop strategic funding mechanisms that will enable the implementation of CEH activities, such as the incorporation of the environment into major developmental, educational, housing or welfare projects; or proposing innovative child-oriented activities within the context of international conventions, ready for country implementation.
10. Establish a dedicated network on children's environmental health as a platform for collaborating and specialty centres, for research groups focused on different areas, such biomarkers and indicators, and for facilitating communication of scientific knowledge and findings.

We pledge to develop a global plan of action to improve CEH, monitor and report on progress, and we urge WHO to facilitate the development of this plan in collaboration with UNEP and other relevant agencies.

Building partnerships, we will implement activities in close interactive partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations, centers of excellence, academia, professional bodies, educators and other sectors.

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

We recognize and deeply acknowledge the Republic of Korea as the host of the 3rd WHO International Conference on Children's Environmental Health (Busan, Republic of Korea, June 2009) participants have agreed on this Pledge for Action on 10 June 2009, in Busan, Republic of Korea.
