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UN seeks to cut preventable 'lifestyle' deaths in developing world



24 February 2010 – With often preventable, non-communicable diseases such as heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory illness accounting for 60 per cent of all global deaths, experts from around the world gathered at a United Nations forum today to draw up plans to reverse the trend.

Solutions exist to prevent premature deaths from such diseases by cutting tobacco use, unhealthy diets, physical inactivity and the harmful use of alcohol, yet the UN World Health Organization (**WHO**) forecasts that their mortality rate will rise by 17 per cent over the next five years, with the greatest increase in Africa (24 per cent) and the Eastern Mediterranean (23 per cent).

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"Diseases once associated with abundance are now heavily concentrated in poor and disadvantaged groups. Developing countries have the greatest vulnerability and the least resilience," WHO Director-General Margaret Chan told more than 100 key stakeholders at the first Global Forum of the Non-communicable Disease Network (NCDnet) in Geneva.

"Many developing countries are where affluent countries were some decades ago. As we know, many of these countries have mounted successful campaigns against heart disease

and cancers. The sharing of these experiences is another compelling reason for inter-sectoral collaboration through an initiative such as NCDnet.”

Non-communicable diseases currently account for 35 million deaths annually worldwide out of 58.7 million, the majority of them in low and middle-income countries (28.1 million). In developing countries alone, an estimated 8 million such deaths per year are premature, that is below 60 years of age, and could potentially be prevented.

“We have affordable and workable solutions for all countries available today to start to halt the trend,” WHO Assistant Director-General for Non-communicable Diseases and Mental Health Ala Alwan **said**.

“Low- and middle-income countries are asking for our urgent support. We also know that changing people’s lifestyle habits is a long-term process but this is all the more reason why these should be addressed now,” he added, stressing the need to strengthen health systems to enable them to respond more efficiently.

World Bank Acting Vice President Julian Schweitzer highlighted the economic impact of NCDs at both the macroeconomic and household levels in developing countries. “NCDs are the most significant cause of illness and death among working-age populations,” he said. “About three quarters of the NCD disability burden in low- and middle-income countries occurs among those aged between 15 and 69 years.”

NCDnet, a voluntary network of Member States, donors, philanthropic foundations, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector, seeks to focus on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases in low- and middle-income countries through collective advocacy, increasing resources and promoting effective global and regional action to strengthen national capacity.

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