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UN forum on improving urban health opens in Japan



15 November 2010 – With more than half of the world's population now living in urban areas, leaders from governments, academia, media and non-governmental organizations have gathered today at a United Nations forum in Kobe, Japan, to examine how to improve the health of city dwellers.

The three-day Global Forum on Urbanization and Health is a part of a series of events carried out by the UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) for its 2010 campaign on urban health.

The number of urban residents is growing by nearly 60 million people per year, according to the agency. By 2050, 7 in 10 people will live in urban areas. This makes it more vital than ever to incorporate health policies into urban planning.

“Building on the opportunities presented by concentrated urban living, city leaders can have a dramatic and positive impact on the health of their societies,” said WHO Director-General Margaret Chan.

“Providing safe public transport, investing in public utilities, and reducing air pollution by banning smoking in public can lead to a marked improvement in urban public health.”

Participants from over 90 countries will be exchanging policy ideas and best practices to learn how they can enhance the health of their populations and protect them from the effects of environmental change, including climate change, disease outbreaks and disasters, among other things.

In Lagos, Nigeria, where traffic congestion is rampant, municipal authorities have introduced dedicated bus lanes to reduce traffic time and are capitalizing on waterways for transport alternatives.

In the Chinese city of Shanghai, efforts have been made to introduce smoke-free environments: in-door smoke control legislation was passed in March 2010 and the recent World Expo held there was largely smoke free by banning smoking in all restaurants and prohibiting tobacco sales and advertising.

As part of the meeting, WHO and the UN Human Settlements Programme ([UN-HABITAT](#)) will launch on Wednesday the Global Report on Urbanization and Health, entitled “Hidden cities: unmasking and overcoming health inequities in urban settings.”

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