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UN-civil society forum issues call to action to improve health of millions worldwide



Representatives from over 70 countries attended the 63rd annual DPI/NGO Conference in Melbourne, Australia

1 September 2010 – Civil society representatives from more than 70 countries wrapped up a United Nations forum today with an urgent call to action to improve the health of millions of men, women and children worldwide and step up efforts to achieve the globally agreed anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)).

In a wide-ranging declaration adopted at the end of the three-day meeting in Melbourne, Australia, participants stressed that achieving the MDGs, which world leaders have pledged to do by 2015, "is a moral imperative."

Improving global health, especially in connection with the MDGs, was the theme of the 63rd annual UN Department of Public Information (DPI)/Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) [Conference](#), which drew some 1,600 participants representing at least 350 groups.

The wide-ranging declaration also stated that the Goals, all of which affect the health of populations, despite some progress, "are significantly off-track for the poorest and least politically powerful people."

Significant remaining challenges included: 1 billion people without access to food; 2.6 billion who lack access to improved sanitation; eight out of 10 without access to safe drinking water who live in rural areas; nearly 9 million children who die before the age of five; and at least 340,000 women who die each year of pregnancy-related causes.

Kiyo Akasaka, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, said that while frustration had been expressed at the conference over the lack of enough improvement in some regions towards attaining the MDGs, the most urgent task was to help quicken the pace of progress.

"This is not the time to question the validity of the MDGs themselves, but rather a time to roll up our sleeves and do what is necessary to attain them, and beyond that, to look at the question of ensuring that they are sustainable after 2015," he stated at the closing ceremony.

The NGOs appealed in the declaration for all governments, agencies, corporations and individuals to deliver on their human rights obligations to more than a billion people living in poverty, by committing the finances and political will necessary to achieve the Goals.

Towards improving global health, the text compelled all governments and health actors to respect the rights of communities while also maximizing the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of their work by leveraging community knowledge and support. It also highlighted the central role that individuals, families and communities must play in fostering global health.

Mr. Akasaka said he hoped participants, as the "torch-bearers of this conference," will take what they have learned back to their organizations and communities, and help raise awareness about what is at stake.

"Your advocacy plays a major role in holding governments accountable for honouring their pledges and commitments and upholding their responsibilities to protect and save their children and people... You are all good friends to the United Nations. You are our greatest allies and partners."

He added that the declaration should be channelled to governments and into the inter-governmental process to impact the MDG Summit, to be held at UN Headquarters in New York from 20 to 22 September.

Next year's DPI-NGO conference, on the theme "Sustainable Societies, Responsive Citizens," is slated to be held in Bonn, Germany.

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