Global conference sets health action agenda for the implementation of the Paris Agreement

8 JULY 2016 | PARIS – Participants attending the *Second Global Conference on Health and Climate,* hosted by the Government of France, COP21 presidency, proposed key actions for the implementation of the Paris agreement to reduce health risks linked to climate change. The action agenda is a contribution to COP22, under the Presidency of the Government of Morocco, in Marrakech in November 2016.

Climate change and health

The World Health Organization estimates that climate change is already causing tens of thousands of deaths every year. These deaths arise from more frequent epidemics of diseases like cholera, the vastly expanded geographical distribution of diseases like dengue, and from extreme weather events, like heatwaves and floods. At the same time, nearly 7 million people each year die from diseases caused by air pollution, such as lung cancer and stroke.

Experts predict that, by 2030, climate change will cause an additional 250 000 deaths each year from malaria, diarrhoeal disease, heat stress and undernutrition alone. The heaviest burden will fall on children, women, older people and the poor, further widening existing health inequalities between and within populations.

Need for urgent action

The conference highlighted the benefits of switching to cleaner energy sources. These will help reduce levels of climate and air pollutants, as well as providing desperately needed power for health facilities in low-income countries. The health sector should themselves make a greater effort to promote low-carbon healthcare facilities and technologies; these can simultaneously improve service delivery and reduce costs as well as climate and environmental impacts.

Participants recommended moving to more sustainable food production and healthier diets to improve the environment and reduce noncommunicable diseases. One way to do this would be to promote diets rich in fruits and vegetables including local in-season varieties.

They called for countries to adopt a new approach to link health economics assessment and climate change, for example, by calculating the avoided healthcare costs, when countries invest in mitigation of climate emissions, and protection from climate risks. To develop this work, WHO announced a new working group which will articulate a new coherent approach to health economics and climate change. To do so, it is recommended that countries spend more on protecting health from risks linked to climate, such as extreme weather events and outbreaks of infectious disease and in cleaner energy sources, more sustainable transport

systems and urban planning that also reduces major health risks, for example air pollution in cities and in the home. Recommendations also focus on scaling up financing on climate change and health through additional resources and mechanisms and existing resources earmarked for adaptation.

They urged different stakeholder groups to work together to highlight ways to address climate change and improve health, for example through a broad health and environment climate coalition.

Participants also focussed on the need to measure the progress that countries are making in protecting health from climate change, and reporting through the WHO/UNFCCC climate and health country profiles and Sustainable Development Goal indicators. WHO has already published profiles on 40 countries.

Finally, they highlighted the importance of the health sector providing strong leadership in communicating to policymakers and the public about the urgent nature of climate change, its severe and growing health risks, gains that can be obtained by addressing climate risks and links to related issues, for example climate change and air pollution. This is the goal of The breathe life campaign, by WHO and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, launched during the conference.

The conference, hosted by WHO and the Government of France and in close collaboration with the Government of Morocco, brought together more than 300 government ministers, health experts and practitioners, non-governmental organizations, and experts in climate change and sustainable development.

Web link: www.who.int/phe

Climate and Health Country Profiles are available at http://www.who.int/globalchange/resources/countries/en/