GENEVA / LYON, France ¦ 1 February 2013 – More than **half** of **all countries worldwide** are **str**

uggling
to
prevent

cancer
and
provide
treatment
and
chronic
care
to
cancer
patients
, warns a recent World Health Organization (WHO) survey for World Cancer Day. This means, currently many of these countries do not have a functional cancer control plan that includes prevention, early detection, treatment and care. There is an urgent need to help countries to reduce cancer deaths and provide appropriate long-term treatment and care to avoid human suffering and protect countries' social and economic development.

Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide. 7.6 million people died from cancer worldwide in 2008 and every year almost 13 million cancer cases are newly diagnosed. Already more than two-thirds of these new cancer cases and deaths occur in developing countries where cancer incidence continues to increase at alarming rates. Research suggests that currently a third of all cancer deaths are due to modifiable risks including tobacco use, obesity, harmful use of alcohol and infections. If detected early many types of cancer such as breast cancer, cervical cancer and colorectal cancer can be successfully cured.

"Cancer should not be a death sentence anywhere in the world as there are proven ways to prevent and cure many cancers," says Dr Oleg Chestnov, WHO Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health. "In order to reduce exposure to risk factors leading to cancer and ensure that every person living with cancer gets access to appropriate care and treatment, comprehensive cancer control programmes need to be set up in every country."

The recent survey on national capacity for noncommunicable diseases, which included responses from 185 countries, revealed major gaps in cancer control planning and services. Even if countries developed cancer plans or policies, many countries are struggling to move from commitment to action. Often these plans are not integrated into wider national health and development planning. In addition, many countries lack institutional capacity, as well as decisive leadership to ensure adequate national funding for cancer control. Only 17% of the African countries and 27% of the low-income countries have cancer control plans with a

budget to support implementation.

Furthermore, less than 50% of countries have population-based cancer registries. These registries are critical to capture high-quality information on the numbers and types of cancer cases so that effective national policies for cancer control can be developed, implemented and evaluated.

Recently, political commitments from world leaders to address cancer have gained steam, including discussions at the national level of funding cancer treatment and care by raising taxes on tobacco and alcohol, which are known risk factors for some cancers.

To support Member States' capacity to measure their cancer burden and collect reliable data, WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) introduced the Global Initiative for Cancer Registry Development in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (GICR) that is backed by many international, regional and national partners. The first regional hub was launched in Mumbai, India, in 2012 and the second in Izmir, Turkey, will become operational in 2013. In addition, the African Network of Cancer Registries expanded significantly over the last year providing much needed support to registries across the continent.

"This initiative is supporting mainly those countries that lack the resources to efficiently fight the rapidly growing cancer burden," says Dr Christopher Wild, Director of IARC. "Better data on cancer occurrence will help governments to make the most of their limited resources and direct funds and activities to the areas where they are needed most."

Cancer registries will help countries to measure one of the indicators set by the agreed WHO global monitoring framework for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases. The framework which will be up for adoption by Member States during the World Health Assembly in May, comprises nine global targets and 25 indicators to prevent and control major noncommunicable diseases, including cancer.

It encourages Member States to measure cancer incidence and the availability of life-saving interventions such as cervical cancer screening, vaccination against hepatitis B and human papilloma virus (HPV) as well as palliative care for cancer patients. In addition, the framework also promotes the monitoring of some major cancer risk factors such as tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, and unhealthy diet.

World Cancer Day (4 February) is an annual event initiated by the Union for International Cancer Control that calls on people, organizations and government agencies around the world to unite in the fight against the global cancer epidemic. This year, the campaign focuses on improving general knowledge around cancer and dispelling misconceptions about the disease.