

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon calls for an international commitment for NCDs

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27 January 2011 – With non-communicable diseases such as cancer, stroke and heart disease accounting for 60 per cent of all deaths, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called on the world's businesses leaders to help curb the risk factors behind a scourge that is expected to increase by half in developing countries by 2030.

“We cannot allow chronic diseases to even further amplify the health challenges faced by developing countries, especially when we know the solutions,” he told a plenary session of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on combatting the illnesses, which every year kill 35 million people, half of them under 70 years old, and also include chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes. “Certainly, we want to work more closely with pharmaceutical companies to make medicines more affordable and accessible. But we will also look to food companies to cut back on the salt, trans fats and sugar, and be more responsible in marketing products to children and providing accurate information on their products. And virtually all industries can help reduce pollution and promote healthy lifestyles.”

The United Nations General Assembly will hold a High-level Meeting on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases in September in New York, attended by heads of State and government, and success requires public-private partnerships, Mr. Ban stressed. “It requires political vision and resource mobilization across sectors, across ministries and across borders. We also need businesses to be there in full force, and not just the health industry...” “To the business executives here, let me say: the well-being of your workforces, your very productivity and reputation are all at stake in working for global public health.

The summit in September in New York is our chance to broker an international commitment that puts non-communicable diseases high on the development agenda, where they belong.” Noting that the eradication of smallpox three decades ago shows that even the most fearsome killer can be defeated, Mr. Ban stressed that the “grave and growing” problem of non-communicable diseases deserves similar attention, with heart disease, stroke and diabetes already estimated to cost low- and middle-income countries as much as five per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP).

By 2030, chronic disease-related deaths in Africa, the Middle East and South-east Asia will grow by more than 50 per cent while globally diabetes deaths will increase by two-thirds. “Chronic diseases used to be seen as a ‘rich man’s problem’,” he said. “Not anymore. Unhealthy lifestyles are going global. Eighty-five per cent of people who die from

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non-communicable diseases are in the developing world.”

In 2008 the UN World Health Organization (WHO) launched a five-year Action Plan for the Global Strategy to prevent and control four non-communicable diseases – cardiovascular, diabetes, cancers and chronic respiratory diseases and the four shared risk factors, namely tobacco use, physical inactivity, unhealthy diets and harmful use of alcohol.

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