

## Busan Pledge for Action on Children's Health and the Environment

Evidence is increasing that environmental degradation, harmful chemicals, radiation and global climate change pose major threats to the health, development and survival of the world's children. Annually more than 3 million children under 5 years die from preventable environment-related effects, such as diarrhoeal diseases, respiratory infections, malaria and other vector-borne diseases. Moreover, children throughout the world are exposed to a complex array of environmental threats as new risk factors emerge in the context of global changes. The increased production, use and movement of harmful chemicals, unsafe disposal of hazardous waste, growing air and water pollution, poor access to sanitation and hygiene, unexpected effects of some new technologies and the effects of climate change, all have significant negative health impacts. Action is needed to protect the health of the children of today and the adults of the future.

To address these urgent issues, over 600 participants from 60 countries and organizations, a body of health and environment researchers, scientists, practitioners and policy-makers, met in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 7 to 10 June 2009. The mission of this global conference was to draw renewed and urgent attention to children's environmental health (CEH) issues, reposition CEH in the global public health agenda and to improve and promote practical protective policies and actions at all levels. The following were our major findings, conclusions and recommendations:

- We acknowledge:
  - Chronic and acute health risks associated with children's exposure to mercury, lead, arsenic, pesticides, persistent organic/toxic pollutants and industrial chemicals, and to vectors of disease
  - the global threat to children posed by climate change, including increased air pollution, increased heat waves, weather-related disasters, increased infectious disease, loss of biodiversity, degradation of ecosystems, desertification, growing lack of availability of adequate food supplies and access to clean water
  - Magnification of these risks in many parts of the world due to the cumulative impact of genetic susceptibility, disease, malnutrition and poverty
  - The lack of knowledge regarding the potential health impacts of manufactured products such as nanoparticles and other new synthetic products
  - the physical threats posed by the inappropriate use of radiation in health care
  - the challenges associated with the built environment, including obesity.



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- We acknowledge that old and new environmental threats may coexist in homes, schools, playgrounds, health care settings and other places where children spend time.
- We acknowledge the value of existing and developing international agreements and policy frameworks, including the upcoming negotiation for a mercury Convention, where consideration is given to the unique vulnerability of children.
- We recognize the renewed call of commitment to CEH made by the G8 Environment Ministerial Meeting held in Siracusa Italy (April 2009) on research collaboration, children's environmental health protection policies, indicators and programmes, climate change, increased attention to children's health and paediatric environmental health units and the importance given to collaboration between health and environment groups to ensure the promotion and protection of children's environmental health.
- We recognise the existing obstacles for protecting children's health from environmental threats:
  - Lack of awareness of the effects of the environment on human health, and the differences in exposure and health effects for children compared to adults
  - Numerous research gaps and lack of coordination of research efforts across countries
  - Poor links among the health, environment and policy-making sectors
  - Lack of education and capacity building for health care providers on children's environmental health issues
  - Limited practical scientific information for policy-makers and communities, who have limited resources, yet are concerned about the environment and their children's health.
- We recognise that although much progress has been made, much more needs to be done to address the burden of environmental hazards on child health and survival. Many children's environmental exposures can be reduced or eliminated because we have (i) a significant body of knowledge on the unique susceptibility of children; (ii) the tools and mechanisms available to increase this body of knowledge and address the issues; (iii) existing and developing partnerships at various levels; and (iv) regional and international agreements for purposeful next steps.
- We reaffirm the outcomes of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference on Children's Health and the Environment (held in Bangkok, Thailand in 2002) which clearly outlined the main 'Environmental Threats to the Health of Children: Hazards and Vulnerability' and the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Children's Health and the Environment (held in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2005), which addressed the need for 'Increasing Knowledge for Taking Action', while our focus at this 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Children's Health and Environment was on the need to increase international collaboration to move with vigour to translate research results, new knowledge and international agreements into concrete political commitments and stronger practical policies for action.



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As participants, organizations and individuals, we are committed to providing healthy environments for children. We pledge to translate research and knowledge into preventive policies and protective actions and to strengthen our efforts and we will:

1. **Advocate for the recognition, assessment, and consideration of hazardous environmental influences on children's health and development**
2. **Contribute to raising the political profile of children's environmental health locally nationally, regionally and internationally**
3. **Raise awareness about global climate change, green growth, and children's environmental health synergies**
4. **Train, educate and inform children, parents and key stakeholders at all levels (including health care workers, environment professionals, non-governmental organizations, industry, and policy-makers) about children's health and the environment**
5. **Integrate children's environmental health into existing public health programmes, especially into primary health care programmes, regional initiatives, Conventions and other programmes that address children and their environments**
6. **Develop and strengthen specialized children's environmental health centres in order to prevent, diagnose, manage and treat environmentally-related illnesses**
7. **Encourage collaborative CEH research studies that create new knowledge, incorporating biomarkers of environmental exposures and health effects**
8. **Advance the development and use of CEH indicators**
9. **Establish the efficacy of interventions taken to date**
10. **Establish dedicated partnerships and networks on children's environmental health issues as a platform for improving health and the environment**
11. **Strengthen communication among stakeholders as an integral component to advancing progress, create new channels and engage the media in promoting and championing children's environmental health issues**
12. **Develop strategic funding mechanisms that incorporate the environment into major development, educational, housing or welfare projects and into the context of international Conventions for country implementation of CEH activities.**





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We pledge to develop a global plan of action to improve CEH, monitor and report on progress, and we urge WHO and its partners to facilitate the development of this plan in collaboration with all relevant agencies.

We will implement activities in close interactive partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations, centres of excellence, academia, professional bodies, educators and other sectors.

We commit to take CEH issues to the consideration of the higher authorities in our respective countries and to the attention of the international agencies concerned about children's health and the environment and the needs for green growth and sustainability.

We recognize and deeply acknowledge the Republic of Korea as the host of the 3<sup>rd</sup> WHO International Conference on Children's Environmental Health.

***Drafted by Participants on 10 June 2009  
Busan, Republic of Korea.***

