

Iceland

Sixty-fourth World Health Assembly

Geneva, 16 – 24 May 2011

General Discussion: Prevention and Control on Noncommunicable Diseases

Madam President, Director-General, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen!

Allow me to congratulate the President and the officers of the Sixty-Fourth World Health Assembly on their election.

I would like to express our appreciation to the Director-General of the priority given to Noncommunicable diseases (NCD's) in the General Discussion. These diseases present a considerable and increasing challenge to health globally.

The Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of NCD's focuses on four noncommunicable diseases that represent 60% of deaths globally, namely cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers and chronic respiratory diseases.

The Action Plan pays attentions to four major behavioral risk factors for these diseases, two of which are physical inactivity and unhealthy diets. In recent decades changes in living and working conditions and leisure activities have led to less physical activity and less physical labor. At the same time we have seen a rise in the prevalence of associated biological risk factors, like overweight and obesity. In Europe the rate of obesity has more than doubled, in most countries, over the past 20 years, where more than half of the total adult population is now overweight or obese, and Iceland is there no exception. This is a major public health concern that might suggest higher disease burden and health care costs in the future.

Madam President

Most countries envisage serious challenges from noncommunicable diseases, challenges that are disproportionately distributed both between and within countries. The *World Health Statistics 2011*, released last week, shows that many countries are facing a double burden of disease, a burden not only from chronic diseases but also from infectious diseases.

Recently the European Region has been confronted with alarming negative developments concerning communicable diseases, like measles and polio. This is a serious development, as it not only poses threat to European countries, but to other regions as well. This is a complex issue but it is apparent that Europe must examine its vaccination programmes, for successful infectious disease control in the region.

Madam President.

To meet the challenges of growing burden of diseases we need to strengthen our health systems and get more value from national health policies, strategies and plans. We therefore support the development of a common framework for improved health outcomes. Furthermore, as a result of the financial crisis we have experienced constraints on our financial resource, but at the same time a greater need for transparency in decision making, more effectiveness of the health care system and more value for money from the health care spending.

Madam President.

This month marks the beginning of the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety, where countries have committed to take further measures to reduce road accidents. The Government of Iceland has planned several actions in relation to the decade, one of which is to support research of therapies for spinal cord injuries.

Finally, Madam President, distinguished delegates,

We share the concerns of the Director General of the effect of the current economic crisis on the organization, its shortage on resources and overextension regarding its mandate. We therefore welcome the DG's reform agenda, presented in her report to the World Health Assembly and believe it will strengthen the central role of WHO in global health governance.

Iceland remains committed in contributing to the constructive efforts of WHO in improving global health.

Thank you.