

World Health Assembly elects Jong-Wook Lee Director-General of WHO

The World Health Assembly has elected Dr Jong-Wook Lee of the Republic of Korea as the next Director-General of WHO. The Health Assembly, which brings together all 192 Member States of WHO, thus confirmed on 21 May the nomination of Dr Lee by WHO's Executive Board at its meeting in January. He is the first person from the Republic of Korea to be chosen to head a United Nations agency.

Dr Lee announced that "results at country level" would be the principal focus for his five-year term. This would be pursued through measurable health objectives, shifting resources to countries, increasing efficiency and accountability, and strengthening human resources. He said he would immediately expand and strengthen the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network to identify and contain disease outbreaks around the world.

In his speech Dr Lee praised the dedication and commitment of Carlo Urbani, the WHO physician who first identified SARS in Hanoi, and subsequently died of the disease. "Carlo Urbani has given us an image of WHO at its best," he said. "Not pushing paper but pushing back the assault of poverty and disease."

"The world today needs leadership in the ongoing struggle for security and justice," Dr Lee told the Assembly, "— security from infections, and justice for those afflicted by the diseases of poverty."

He recalled WHO's commitment, as stated in its Constitution, to work for the highest attainable standard of health for every human being without distinction as to race, religion, political belief or economic or social condition. "These commitments are not naïve," he said. "They emerged from the most destructive war the world has ever seen."

Dr Lee is working with a team of advisers to prepare the next phase of WHO's work. His term as Director-General begins on 21 July. ■

Countries press ahead to ratify global tobacco control treaty

Twenty-eight countries and the European Community signed the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) on the first day it was open for signature, 16 June. Once the treaty has been ratified by 40 countries, it comes into force, which means it will be legally binding for those countries and for all those that ratify it subsequently.

The FCTC is the first international treaty to be negotiated under the auspices of WHO. It requires countries to impose restrictions on tobacco advertising, sponsorship and promotion, establish new labelling and clean indoor air controls, and strengthen legislation to clamp down on tobacco smuggling. The provisions set out in the Convention are seen as an international floor; countries and regional organizations are free to legislate for higher levels of control.

The Convention was adopted unanimously on 21 May by the 192 countries comprising the World Health Assembly. On the occasion of its adoption, Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director-General of WHO, told the Health Assembly: "Today we are acting to save millions of lives and protect people's health for generations to come. This is a historic moment in global public health, demonstrating the international will to tackle a threat to health head on."

Four years in the making, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control has been a priority in WHO's global work to stem the tobacco epidemic. Tobacco now kills some five million people each year. The death toll could reach 10 million a year by 2020 if countries do not implement the measures of the FCTC.

More information on the treaty is available from: http://www.who.int/health_topics/tobacco/en/ ■

WHO announces public-private initiative on disease surveillance

WHO is setting up a new public-private initiative to fight SARS and build capacity for surveillance, epidemiology and public health facilities in China and the surrounding region. The announcement was made during the World Health Assembly on 22 May.

"Despite the rapid and effective response from partners around the world, SARS exposes fundamental weaknesses in global health infrastructure," said Dr Jong-Wook Lee, Director-General Elect of WHO. "In particular, the epidemic highlights the need for local and national surveillance and response mechanisms. This new fund and other innovative initiatives like it will help prepare the world to respond to future emerging diseases."

The international business community has pledged support to mobilize the resources needed initially to carry out this work through a special fund. The World Economic Forum's Global Health Initiative and WHO will work together to assemble a coalition of business leaders and committed individuals who will mobilize the resources for the fund. The initial target is US\$ 100 million by September from the business community, especially companies with operations or markets in Asia.

WHO is also working to raise an additional US\$ 100 million from bilateral donors to support expanded surveillance and response across the globe. These funds are seen as just the first step in an ongoing global commitment to provide against the threat of infectious diseases. ■



Dr Brundtland congratulates Dr Lee on his election as her successor.