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The Pan American forum for action against chronic diseases: A pioneering multi-sectoral initiative - Editorial.

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In this issue we also report on negotiations and discussions which are receiving less global attention. Paolo de Tarso Lugon Arantes writes on the final stage of the negotiations of a Protocol on Illicit Trade within the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Bente Molenaar provides an update on discussions about the harmful consumption of alcohol; as one of the four key risk factors for NCDs, it was on the agenda of the NCD Summit in New York. However, alcohol producers and retailers have not been subjected to the same level of scrutiny as the tobacco or food industry.

Paul Gully writes on the latest meeting of the initiative “Toward a safer world,” examining lessons learned from pandemic preparedness efforts, especially the recent experiences with influenza preparedness. This issue also includes coverage of regional health negotiations; Adam Karamdt-Scott reports on the discussions regarding the most effective strategies to tackle HIV/AIDS in the South East Asia region.

Major discussions are currently taking place on the global health governance front. The WHO is in the midst of major rethinking of its role; Priyanka Kanth describes the state of the debate, as member states are meeting in a special session on reforming the WHO on November 1-3, 2011. In contrast, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) has risen in the global health architecture as a central and effective actor. Bente Molenaar reviews the outcome of the last pledging conference and the nature of the discussions on the future of GAVI.

As always we welcome your feedback on this issue of the Monitor and your suggestions on emerging and ongoing diplomatic processes warranting coverage in future issues.

- Chantal Blouin

**EDITORIAL**

**THE PAN AMERICAN FORUM FOR ACTION AGAINST CHRONIC DISEASES: A PIONEERING MULTI-SECTORAL INITIATIVE**

Diego Bernardini

“The burden of non-communicable diseases (NDCs) on our societies has been described by Dr. Mirta Roses, Director of the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO), as a “tsunami.” In the Americas Region, NCDs are the leading cause of death, especially those related to cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and diabetes. Three of every four deaths in the region are due to NCDs. There are some 145 million smokers and 139 million overweight people in the region, the burden is the largest amongst women, the poor, and the least educated populations.

To meet the challenges presented by NCDs, Member Countries are already working on a series of initiatives such as public awareness about the importance of prevention, the promotion of healthy lifestyles including proper diet, regular physical activity, moderate consumption of alcohol, and not smoking. Today we know that with only a 20% reduction in the consumption of tobacco, a 15% reduction in salt intake, and an increase to 60% of patients with high cardiovascular risk on a simple drug regime, we could prevent nearly 3.4 million deaths in the next 10 years. In addition to saving lives, economic losses in the billions could be prevented.

On September 21, 2011 in New York during the United Nations High Level Meeting on Non Communicable Diseases, PAHO launched the
Pan American Forum for Action Against Chronic Diseases (PAF). The Pan American Forum is a pioneering and innovative initiative looking to achieve the type of strong multi-sector collaboration needed to scale up the initiatives already underway such as the advocacy and communication campaign as Get the Message, implemented by the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, the “Act now!” campaign in Canada, the health promoters in Mexico, and the Ciclovias project in Columbia.

The Pan-American Forum is a multi-stakeholder platform where the public sector, the private sector and civil society can share information and best practices. It is a space for exchange and dialogue. The participation of the private sector as a strategy for improving health has not been free from debates and controversies. For the PAHO and WHO, the main challenge is the fine balance between opportunities and risks associated with the participation of public and private interests. The mandate given by member countries stipulates that credibility, independence, objectivity, integrity, and impartiality must be assured at all times. Private sector engagement will be considered on a case-by-case basis by our legal department to prevent any real or perceived conflict of interest. While the Forum aims to be inclusive in its partnerships, there are some sectors that are excluded from engagement. These include tobacco, alcohol, arms and armament industries.

One of the great strengths of the Pan American Forum is the potential for the integration of various sectors to a single platform that concentrates on the development of better ways to translate policies into action. The PAHO’s regional plan of action for Chronic Disease adopted in 2006 is one such policy the Forum could help to move from policy into action. Based on this alliance with non-traditional partners, the Forum will be more than a place of dialogue, but also a platform for joint action on specific projects and issues such as workplace wellness or salt reduction. We hope that the Pan American Forum against Chronic Diseases will be an effective mechanism to implement the “whole-of-society” approach, as was re-affirmed in the political declaration adopted at the UN high-level meeting on NCDs.

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