

NEWS RELEASE

WHO and EFA Call for Global Action on Chronic Respiratory Disease

*Call to reduce the four million deaths annually,
from a condition responsible for more fatalities globally than AIDS¹*

ROME, June 11 2009 – The World Health Organisation (WHO) and European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases (EFA) today announced that they are bringing together over 150 international delegates to discuss the growing epidemic of Chronic Respiratory Diseases (CRD) that affects one billion people worldwide^{1,2,3} and is responsible for four million deaths annually. The conference which will discuss the implementation of a five-year initiative to unite policy makers, providers and patient groups will be hosted by the Italian Ministry of Health in Rome on June 12 and 13.

EFA and the WHO Global Alliance against Chronic Respiratory Diseases (GARD) are working for and with respiratory disease patients for a world where everyone breathes freely. The conference will look into the role of patient organisations and the implementation of the GARD Action Plan 2008-2013 within the framework of the WHO's Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases 2008-2013. The action plan shows that there is a clear need for collaboration between health policy makers, providers and patient organisations to improve care and the environment and the integration of health concerns into all policies⁴. By joining forces of European patient associations through EFA with GARD, this major alliance has become a global influence through a strong united patients' voice in all five continents.

Presenting at the conference will be leading respiratory expert, Jean Bousquet, Professor of Pulmonary Medicine at the University of Montpellier and Chairman of WHO GARD: "The burden of allergy, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in Europe and the rest of world is such that the cost of inaction is unacceptable and the WHO has recognised the enormous human suffering from chronic respiratory diseases, and are therefore making CRD one of its priorities between 2008-13."

Marianella Salapatras, Acting President, EFA: "Our overall message to policy makers and the new European Parliament and Commission is that chronic respiratory diseases such as allergy, asthma and COPD are public health problems and we therefore need innovative and comprehensive strategies and collaboration, including with patient organisations, to fight against and improve care and the environment."

Italian MEP Cristina Muscardini will be contributing to the opening presentations: "In the EU, chronic respiratory diseases are significant public health issues despite the availability of treatment options and in some cases, prevention strategies. EU Health Strategy needs to take the burden on chronic respiratory diseases into consideration."

One billion people in the world currently suffer from CRDs^{1,2,3} and every year four million people die as a result, a figure higher than for deaths related to other global diseases such as AIDS. The fact that this epidemic is on the rise⁴ and that every person in the world is exposed to the risk factors of CRD^{5,6,7,8} has been the key motivator to bring together delegates from around the world to attend this important conference.

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About EFA

The European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) is an alliance of 32 member organisations in over 21 countries, founded in 1991. EFA is committed to improve the health and quality of care of patients with allergy, asthma and COPD and encourage patient participation throughout Europe in EU advocacy, capacity building of members and sharing best practices. EFA's priorities include strengthening related EU policies, providing greater access to and quality of medical and social care, conducting meaningful patient centred research, commissioning patient care services, sharing a voice in care delivery and improving the quality of indoor and outdoor air. <http://www.efanet.org>

About GARD

The Global Alliance against Chronic Respiratory Diseases (GARD) contributes to WHO's global work to prevent and control chronic respiratory diseases. GARD is a voluntary alliance of national and international organisations, institutions and agencies from a range of countries working towards the common goal of reducing the global burden of chronic respiratory diseases. Its vision is a world where all people breathe freely. GARD promotes an integrated approach that capitalizes upon synergies of chronic respiratory diseases with other chronic diseases. GARD focuses specifically on the needs of low- and middle-income countries and vulnerable populations, and fosters country-specific initiatives that are tailored to local needs and primary health care. More information is available on the web site of GARD: <http://www.who.int/gard/en/index.html>

About CRDs

Chronic respiratory diseases include a wide range of treatable, and in some cases preventable respiratory diseases from asthma, respiratory allergies and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease to occupational lung diseases, sleep apnea syndrome and pulmonary hypertension. Hundreds of millions of people suffer every day from chronic respiratory disease. According to the latest WHO estimates (2007), currently 300 million people have asthma; 210 million people have COPD while millions have allergic rhinitis and other often-underdiagnosed chronic respiratory diseases⁹.

¹ Bousquet J, Khaltaev N. Global surveillance, prevention and control of Chronic Respiratory Diseases. A comprehensive approach. Global Alliance against Chronic Respiratory Diseases. World Health Organisation. ISBN 978 92 4 156346 8. 2007:148 pages

² Bousquet PJ, Leynaert B, Neukirch F, Sunyer J, Janson CM, Anto J, et al. Geographical distribution of atopic rhinitis in the European Community Respiratory Health Survey I. Allergy. 2008 Oct;63(10):1301-9

³ Weinmayr G, Forastiere F, Weiland SK, Rzehak P, Abramidze T, Annesi-Maesano I, et al. International variation in prevalence of rhinitis and its relationship with sensitisation to perennial and seasonal allergens. Eur Respir J. 2008 Nov;32(5):1250-61

⁴ 2008-2013 Action plan for the global strategy for the prevention and control of non communicable diseases. Prevent and control cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes. www.who.int/nmh/Actionplan-PC-NCD-2008.pdf, Accessed 20 May 2009

⁵ United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA). State of the world population 2007. www.unfpa.org. 2007.

⁶ Torres-Duque C, Maldonado D, Perez-Padilla R, Ezzati M, Viegi G. Biomass Fuels and Respiratory Diseases: A Review of the Evidence. Proc Am Thorac Soc. 2008 Jul;5(5):577-90.

⁷ Esson K, Leeder S. The Millennium Development Goals and Tobacco Control. An opportunity for global partnership. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organisation, www.who.int/tobacco; 2003.

⁸ Balme J, Becklake M, Blanc P, Henneberger P, Kreiss K, Mapp C, et al. American Thoracic Society Statement: Occupational contribution to the burden of airway disease. Am J Respir Crit Care Med. 2003 Mar 1;167(5):787-97.

⁹ World Health Organisation, Chronic Respiratory Diseases, <http://www.who.int/respiratory/en/index.html>, Accessed 20 May 2009