To: Health Ministers of EU Member States

Brussels, 30 June 2009

RE: Health must become central to climate change towards Copenhagen and beyond

Dear Minister

On the eve of the Swedish Presidency of the European Union, we would like to remind you that the coming six months are crucial for protecting people’s health and the financial viability of health care systems by reaching an ambitious, fair, and effective international agreement at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009.

Climate change is affecting people’s health, and the systems for health care in the EU and globally. Currently there is little representation from public health and health care communities in the climate change discussions. There is insufficient awareness of the negative impacts of climate change on health or of the potential benefits to health of reducing greenhouse emissions. Health ministers can show effective leadership and make an important impact in raising awareness and planning for adaptation and mitigation within the health sector.

We therefore call on you to incorporate clear health messages in the international and EU climate change discussions and outcomes, and specifically during the forthcoming international climate change discussions in preparation for and at Copenhagen¹. Below, we propose some key messages, and in the annex, some further reading:

1. More health representation and awareness

¹ UNFCCC planned meetings:

- 10-14 Aug.: Informal meeting in Bonn.
- 28 Sept.-9 Oct.: Summit in Bangkok.
- 2-6 Nov.: Formal meeting in Barcelona.
- 7-18 Dec.: United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen set to culminate in new climate agreement.
Lead the way in ensuring increased representation from the health sector and better communication of health issues at stake in climate change discussions and outcomes. Strengthen public and policy-makers’ awareness of the current and projected adverse and inequitable health impacts of climate change and highlight the potential for health benefits and consequent massive cost-savings from well-conceived climate-control policies. Please see Annex I for more information.

2. Increase public health benefits of climate change

Public health benefits, such as reduced respiratory illnesses, can be achieved by encouraging the EU to maintain its leadership role in climate change negotiations with a commitment to at least 30% or more domestic greenhouse gas reductions by 2020 from 1990 emission levels. Lower the dependence on resource-intensive therapies by prioritizing primary health care and pursuing disease prevention strategies, which can simultaneously reduce the burden of disease and the health sector’s fossil fuel consumption. Please see Annex II for more information.

3. Promote equitable funding mechanisms and support for climate change mitigation and adaptation

Current funding for health projects is very low. Ensure that the EU is committed to fighting climate change in the EU and externally by securing accessible, predictable, binding funding mechanisms, in addition to Overseas Development Assistance. These funding mechanisms should be dedicated to i) reducing the health sector's greenhouse gas emissions ii) supporting programmes that protect public health from climate change-related threats iii) assisting the most affected and vulnerable communities around the world to fight and cope with climate change. The health sector is already working to reduce its carbon footprint. Our recently released joint-WHO discussion report provides case studies of what some hospitals are already doing. Please see Annex III for more information.

4. Support the World Health Organization’s Ministerial Declaration

Health and Environment Ministers from the 53 countries in the WHO European region will be adopting a Ministerial Declaration at the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health to take place in Parma, Italy on 10-12 March 2010. The Draft Declaration contains a section on Protecting health and the environment from climate change that will be discussed at a meeting of ministry representatives on 14-17 September in Denmark and again in early November. It is very important that your country supports the draft declaration which will be negotiated in the coming months for adoption in Parma. See Annex IV for more information.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that health becomes a cornerstone of international and EU climate change policy.

Sincerely,
Genon Jensen  
Executive Director  
Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

Anja Leetz  
Executive Director  
Healthcare Without Harm Europe (HCWH E)

Contact: Pendo Maro, PhD, Joint Senior Climate Change and Energy Advisor, Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) and Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)  
28 Boulevard Charlemagne, 1000-Brussels, Belgium. Tel: +32 2 234 4647. E-mail: pendo.maro@hcwh.org

Health Care Without Harm is a global network of more than 480 organisations in more than 50 countries, working to transform the health care sector so it is no longer a source of harm to people and the environment. Website: www.noharm.org

The Health and Environment Alliance aims to raise awareness of how environmental protection improves health. It brings together more than 60 organizations working at the European level. Website: www.env-health.org
Annexes

Annex I

In April 2009, Dr Roberto Bertollini, Senior Advisor and Coordinator, Public Health and Environment Department, World Health Organization asked for the under-representation of health expertise in the climate change talks to be addressed. He said that only about 20 of the official 10,000 participants to the UNFCCC process are from the health sector.

"Climate Change and Health: The Global Perspective" presentation by Dr Roberto Bertollini, Senior Advisor and Coordinator, Public Health and Environment Department, World Health Organization, Geneva (copy available on request from Diana Smith, Diana@gsmith.com.fr or +33 6 33 04 2943)

Annex II

If the European Union increased its target greenhouse gas emission reductions from the present 20% to 30%, the total savings from death and ill-health due to respiratory conditions alone could reach an additional 25 billion Euros per year by 2020. Fewer emissions result in cleaner air, fewer premature deaths among people with existing respiratory problems, 5,300 fewer cases of bronchitis, and 2,800 fewer hospital admissions each year. See report from HEAL, CAN Europe and WWF entitled "The co-benefits to health of a strong EU climate change policy" available at http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Co-benefits_to_health_report_-_september_2008.pdf. Please find enclosed a short summary of this report.

Annex III

Funding for health projects is very low. In April 2009, Dr Roberto Bertollini, Senior Advisor and Coordinator, Public Health and Environment Department, World Health Organization told a meeting of health and environment ministers from 53 European countries that although 32 of the world's 38 poorest countries identified health in their national action plans on climate change, funding for health has received only less than 1% of allocations under the climate change framework.

"Climate Change and Health: The Global Perspective" presentation by Dr Roberto Bertollini, Senior Advisor and Coordinator, Public Health and Environment Department, World Health Organization, Geneva (copy available on request from Diana Smith, Diana@gsmith.com.fr or +33 6 33 04 2943).

The health sector is already working to reduce its carbon footprint. A recently released WHO-HCWH-HEAL report provides case studies of what hospitals are doing. The report: "Healthy Hospitals, Healthy Planet, Healthy People: Addressing climate change in health care settings", Discussion Draft is available at www.noharm.org or http://env-health.org/a/3351. Please find copy enclosed.

Annex IV
More information on the way towards Parma 2010, preparatory meetings and draft documents and agendas can be found at the Ministerial Conference website: http://www.euro.who.int/parma2010

Excerpt from section B. Protecting health and the environment from climate change of the Draft Ministerial Declaration (version of 23 March 2009) to be adopted in Parma:

1. We, the Ministers of Health and Environment of WHO’s Member States in the European Region and representatives of partner organizations, share a commitment to protecting health and promoting health equity, health security and healthy environments in a changing climate. We will:
   i. ensure that all current and future climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, policies and strategies include health issues at all levels
   ii. strengthen health systems to cope with the impacts of climate change on human health and security and to derive health co-benefits from measures and policies, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups and, if appropriate, subregions
   iii. raise awareness to encourage healthy mitigation and adaptation policies in all sectors;
   iv. increase the health sector’s contribution to ensuring energy- and resource-efficient management that will result in decreased greenhouse gas emissions and financial and adaptation benefits.

2. We hereby adopt the Regional Framework for Action entitled Protecting health in an environment challenged by climate change and affirm our commitment to attaining the objectives contained in it. We will ensure that the approaches described in it are effectively implemented on a national basis.

3. We call on the WHO Regional Office for Europe, in collaboration with the European Commission and other partners, to set up a European [information platform/clearing house], for systematic sharing of best practices, research, data, information, technology and tools at all levels, and to assist Member States in fulfilling their commitments; we commit ourselves to providing the [financial and human] resources required to ensure its long-term sustainability. We will report on the progress achieved in this respect to the next [high-level meeting/ministerial conference] to be held [in 2015].

Annex V

Please find enclosed: European Lung Foundation’s Climate and Lung health factsheet.