

## CLIMATE CHANGE, A GLOBAL HEALTH CHALLENGE

Climate change is an issue of enormous proportions affecting everyone in the world. We are surrounded by the environment. Factors from floods to fire; from deforestation to industrial gas emissions; from our deep oceans to our land mass result in global warming that impacts our health. Over the past 650,000 years, the climate has changed gradually, due to natural forces, fluctuating between ice ages and warmer periods. In modern-day, however, humans have ignored the climate causing a serious rise in the average global temperature. Activities such as industrialization, deforestation and agriculture, have produced greenhouse gases (GHGs). The result has been extreme weather events, rising sea levels and melting polar ice caps. Since 1880, the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, we have experienced temperatures reaching to a little more than 1.8°F with 42 percent more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This has caused extreme weather events that have far-reaching social, economic and political consequences for every sector of the society.

The COP26, (Conference of the Parties), 2021 meeting, was based on a treaty agreed to in 1994, 26 years ago, at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In December, 2015, at the Paris Accords, COP21, and again this year, leaders from over 100 countries, across the globe, gathered to discuss the warming climate. Attendees represented lands that account for nearly 86 percent of the world's forests. They voted to stop deforestation by the end of this decade. Additionally, more than 30 financial institutions pledged to eliminate deforestation driven by agriculture, from their portfolios, and increase investments in nature-based solutions by 2025.

Deforestation, is at the root of the climate crisis, leading to water shortages, desertification, landslides, mass extinction, zoonotic diseases, and global warming. By stopping the infusion of money into activities that destroy forests and by pledging to, instead, restore and protect these lands, the actions at COP26 could be on track to move the needle closer to the goals. Additionally, developing nations

represented at COP26 demanded that the developed countries who are the large contributors to climate change pledge \$100 billion per year to help developing nations reduce emissions and adapt to the worsening effects of climate change,

Key Highlights of COP26 include:

- A plan backed by more than 100 countries to cut methane emissions by 30 percent by 2030;
- An agreement by more than 20 nations, including the United States, to end financing for international fossil fuel projects;
- Promises by more than 130 nations to halt or reverse deforestation by 2030.
- Pledges by more than 40 countries, to join together in the first international commitment to achieve “near-zero” emission steel production by 2030

On the day following the conclusion of COP26, lay leaders from around the world joined together, also in Glasgow, at the 2021 Global Conference on Health and Climate sponsored by the WHO, the Global Climate and Health Alliance, (GCU), the Glasgow Caledonian University, the UK Health Alliance and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Their focus was on climate justice and the participants called on governments, businesses, institutions and financial institutions to drive a green, healthy and resilient recovery from COVID-19.

As the world becomes hotter and more densely populated, and as the demand for food, water and energy grows, the impact of climate on health will grow and exponentially spread. It does not take much scientific research to show the current effects of climate change on public health. Each of the last 3 decades has been successively warmer than any preceding decade since 1850. Sea levels are rising, glaciers are melting and precipitation patterns are changing and the use of fossil fuels to meet growing energy demand is increasing, along with respiratory disease and cancers from carbon pollution. Changes to rainfall patterns is causing a scarcity of clean, safe water available to populations, particularly in developing nations; floods have been uprooting and devastating. Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is

expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year, from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress. The direct damage costs to health systems are estimated to be between USD 2-4 billion per year by 2030. Areas with weak health infrastructures – mostly in developing countries, will be the least able to cope without assistance to prepare and respond.

Climate change has clearly become one of the most significant direct factors on human health. Nobody is excluded from its reach. It is incumbent on all of us to pay attention and do our part to combat such a scourge to the planet.