

News

First WHO Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health: A Brief Report

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The subject conference (documented in www.who.int) was organized by WHO in collaboration with WMO, CCAC, UNFCCC, UNECE, The World Bank, UN-DESA and EU-DEVCO in Geneva, Switzerland from 30 October to 01 November 2018. The conference focus was Saving Lives through improvement of Air Quality and Combatting Climate Change. This was motivated by the voluminous and scientifically informed global evidence on the negative impact on human health that is contributed by air pollution and climate variability.

The conference was organised in ten Plenary Sessions, three Parallel Sessions composed of nine sub-sessions and two Side Events of six sub-events. The pace of the conference was set in Plenary Session I where presentations on scientific evidence on ambient and household air pollution and the connection to climate change were articulated. A moving evidence was delivered in Plenary V by Professor Arvid Kumar, Chairman of Centre for Chest Surgery, Director of the Institute of Robotic Surgery at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Founder Trustee of Lung Care Foundation in New Delhi and President Elect of the Association of Surgeons of India. In his presentation titled “Doctors as active advocates for clean air” he graphically presented a comparable condition of a lung from a non-smoker to one of a smoker as convincing evidence of the impact of air pollution in New Delhi, India.

The Parallel Sessions had topics covering air quality, health effects, air pollution and climate change links; engagement of global stakeholders; and action with a health focus. Three of the major highlights were: (1) the impact of ambient and household air pollution on children, and how interventions to clean the air can support child health and development; (2) air pollution as a major risk factor for cancers and why its mitigation can reduce the epidemic non-communicable diseases; and (3) the high threat to the lives of urban populations considering that currently 50% of the global population lives in cities and this will increase to 70% by 2050. The main highlights of the side events were: (1) major household pollutants besides particulate matter; (2) critical need for improved energy access in sub-Saharan Africa; and (3) the scale and relative severity of the health and economic impacts of local air pollution.

Apparently in Plenary Session X and during the “Roundtable and the launch of new initiatives/pledges/partnerships and commitments by countries, cities and organizations”, while

there were strong commitments and substantial pledges from the North, the commitments from the Africa region were only from Egypt, Morocco, Mozambique and Uganda. However, Ethiopia, Burundi, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan and Uganda participated in presentations.

The author encourages regional air quality stakeholders and policymakers to visit www.who.int and read the documented information.

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