



# WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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## Open letter from the Director-General to the Heads of delegations

Dear Colleagues,

When I spoke to you at the last Health Assembly, I noted that health is moving towards the heart of the development agenda. Better health was increasingly accepted as an important prerequisite in the fight against poverty. In January this year I reported to the Executive Board at its 107th session on several promising signs of a world willing and eager to act to improve the health of *all* its people. I spoke of the massive effort and additional resources needed to make this happen. Throughout the past year, Heads of State have indicated their commitment to scaling up action. The European Commission announced a new focus on fighting HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. Later, in Okinawa, the G8 countries agreed to specific targets to reduce the toll taken by malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and children's diseases by 2010. Similar commitments have been made by other public and private entities.

At the Abuja summit on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and other related infectious diseases, at the end of April, the United Nations Secretary-General responded to this interest by proposing a fund that would collect additional resources in support of effective action to improve health outcomes. This fund would focus on reducing the suffering and other consequences of HIV infection, and the diseases particularly associated with poverty, including malaria and tuberculosis.

I have asked WHO staff to be closely involved in developing proposals for the new fund and mechanisms through which additional resources would be channelled for the improvement of people's health. Together with the Regional Directors, I have sought ways to respond to concerns expressed by Heads of State and ministers of health during my visits to countries, and during a series of high-level meetings (including summits) over the past two years. It seems clear to me that WHO, working closely with other organizations of the United Nations system and the World Bank, will play a major role in helping to ensure that new funds are collected, allocated and used in the most appropriate way, including strengthening health systems so they can respond more effectively to the priority health needs of poor people.

We now have experience of several new partnerships designed to scale up health action, including Roll Back Malaria, Stop Tuberculosis, and the International Partnership against AIDS in Africa. I expect that resources generated through the new fund will support the excellent work already being undertaken through these partnerships, within the context of national health and development strategies. Other important principles for the fund could include:

- the need to bring both cash and commodities quickly to where they can contribute directly to better health;

- the need to focus on measurable health outcomes: the level of support being linked to their achievements of those outcomes;
- the need to improve health systems so that they become effective and are seen to work well;
- the need for decisions in relation to programme and policy options to be based at country level;
- the need for a focus on processes and outputs that benefit women;
- the need for developing countries to be involved in governance, operation and review.

These are issues of vital concern to all of us, and need to be developed with due discussion and deliberations. As we meet during the Health Assembly, I would welcome suggestions and comments from you on the role of WHO in this scaling up of the global response to infectious diseases and other health conditions affecting poor people, and on optimal ways to collect and use new funds for international health.

I look forward to a productive and fruitful discussion at the Health Assembly.

Yours sincerely,

(signed)

Gro Harlem Brundtland, MD, MPH  
Director-General

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