



World Health  
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Environment Programme

**First Inter-Ministerial Conference on Health and Conference in Africa**  
**Health Security through Healthy Environments**

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**29 August 2008**

**AFRICAN HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS  
JOIN TO DEFEND HEALTH FROM ENVIRONMENTAL HARM**

LIBREVILLE, GABON 29 August 08 : Health and Environment Ministers in Africa have resolved to build a strategic health and environment alliance to reduce environmental threats to human health and well-being.

Following the conclusion of an historic gathering in Gabon, the ministers signed and adopted the Libreville Declaration which commits governments to take the required measures to stimulate the necessary policy, institutional and investment changes that should be effected to optimize synergies between health, environment and other relevant sectors.

“The signing of this landmark declaration,” said Dr Luis G. Sambo, Regional Director of WHO Africa Regional Office, “is the first step towards saving the lives of millions of people from the harmful effects of changes in the environment. We will work together to promote strategic alliances between health and environment. I am delighted that we have managed to secure political commitment to catalyze institutional changes needed to improve the health and well being of communities in the region.”

After deliberations on a range of issues, delegates were convinced that the root causes of global environmental degradation are embedded in social and economic problems such as pervasive poverty, unsustainable production and consumption patterns, inequity of distribution of wealth and the debt burden. These result in malaria, tuberculosis, cholera, typhoid, dracunculiasis, helminthiasis, schistosomiasis, asthma, bronchitis and heart diseases that are taking their toll on millions of people living in the region.

"Nowhere else is the threat to human health from environmental degradation more urgent than Africa," said Dr Maria Neira, WHO's Director for Department of Public Health and Environment. "The Libreville declaration is an accomplishment for Africa and beyond. This combined movement initiated today in Africa is a contribution to protection of both the global environment and human health everywhere".

Delegates highlighted the need to address health, environment and economic development issues in an interrelated manner to generate new synergies in poverty reduction and social equity. Ministers expressed their willingness to actively seek partnerships with civil society, including the private sector, and to seek their expertise in effecting change to improve environmental conditions in Africa.

Mme Angélique Ngoma, Minister of Health and Public Hygiene of Gabon, said: "This conference will go down in the annals of Africa as the first to generate a synergy of political action and complementarity between health and environment for sustainable development".

The Declaration urges Member States among other things to:

1. Update their national subregional and regional frameworks in order to address more effectively the interlinkages between health and environment, through integration of these links in policies, strategies and national development plans;
2. Ensure integration of the agreed objectives in the areas of health and environment in national poverty reduction strategies;
3. Implement priority intersectoral programmes at all levels in health and environment, aimed at accelerating the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;

4. Build national and regional capacities to address the linkages between environment and health through the establishment and strengthening of health and environment institutions.

Expressing her appreciation at the outcomes of this landmark Inter-Ministerial Conference, UNEP Regional Director for Africa, Mounkaila Goumandakoye, said: “For too long both health and environment have sought to cope with the downstream consequences of policies regarding environment, health and economic development that have been designed in parallel, not in concert. In valuing the inextricable links between human health and the sustainability of ecosystems along with the goods and services they provide, this historic conference in Africa reasserts that the work of the environment sector is an issue of human well being and that together health and environment in acting proactively are critical development partners in the achievement of global and national development objectives.”

The four-day event held in Libreville, Gabon, was attended by hundreds of delegates, including Health Ministers, Ministers of Environment, high-level experts, academics, policy makers, bilateral & multilateral institutions and NGOs.

**Note to Editors:**

The full text of the Libreville Declaration and further information about the conference is available on the WHO AFRO, website can be accessed on the conference website

<http://www.unep.org/health-env> or on the WHO AFRO website:  
<http://www.afro.who.int>

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