Report of the 29th executive session of the European Environment and Health Committee

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Introduction

1. The WHO European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC) held its twenty-ninth executive session at the Hotel Maritim in Bonn, Germany on 27 and 28 April 2009, before and during the third High-level Preparatory Meeting for the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Parma, Italy, 24–26 February 2010).

2. Both the co-chairmen of the EEHC were unable to attend, owing to the need for them to remain in their home countries and handle the repercussions of the outbreak of influenza A(H1N1). The session was therefore chaired by Mr Massimo Cozzone, alternate to Dr Corrado Clini.

Ministerial Conference programme

3. Dr Lucianne Licari, Regional Adviser, Environment and Health Coordination and Partnerships, explained that a first attempt to revise the Conference programme to take account of EEHC members’ comments had resulted in an impracticable arrangement whereby the Conference would run over into a fourth day. The draft programme now submitted to the EEHC accordingly provided for the Conference to start at 13:30 on Wednesday 24 February 2010 and end by 15:00 on Friday 26 February 2010, to allow delegates time to travel to and leave Parma on those days. Politically important topics (the impact of the current economic crisis on environment and health, climate change and adoption of the Declaration) had been placed at the beginning and end of the Conference, with the second day devoted to more technical aspects (implementation of the Children’s Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe – CEHAPE, environment and health performance reviews, capacity-building, etc.). A number of themes (such as gender, or the specific needs of the newly independent states – NIS – and countries of south-eastern Europe – SEE) would run through the whole Conference.

4. Members of the EEHC welcomed the revised programme, although they called for even more emphasis to be placed on its political aspects, in order to encourage wide participation by ministers. The pre-Conference events planned for the whole of Tuesday should be more closely related to the theme of the Conference itself, perhaps under the heading of “Children’s environment and health as a pillar for sustainable economic development”.

5. At 45 minutes’ duration, the “poster sessions” and “satellite sessions” scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday evenings respectively were too short; the EEHC recommended that provision should be made for extending such sessions (perhaps by having the evening receptions start somewhat later), for a mixture of sessions on each day, and for pre-Conference events to be held on Wednesday morning as well.

6. An EEHC member representing a nongovernmental organization (NGO) provided clarification on arrangements for the CEHAPE awards (scheduled to take place on Thursday morning). A call for entries would be launched in June 2009, winning entries would be selected in October/November (with the involvement of young people as
judges), and award winners would be invited to make short presentations at the Conference itself (funding to cover the costs of award winners’ travel was still being sought).

7. In session 4 (Looking ahead with partners and stakeholders), a panel discussion should be organized involving young people and representatives of NGOs, local authorities and industry/business. The latter should also be involved in session 5 (Challenges and synergies of dealing with climate change).

8. Chairpersons and vice-chairpersons of sessions should be identified in advance and invited to prepare presentations, abstracts of which should be made available before the Conference. More generally, it would be important to strike a balance between environment and health sectors in the background documents and programme of the Conference and in the choice of chairpersons, vice-chairpersons and keynote speakers.

**Food safety**

9. The EEHC noted that the topic of food safety had not been addressed at ministerial conferences held to date but was very important from the point of view of environmental health. In addition, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) was located in Parma, the venue of the Conference. Within the programme there were a number of opportunities to consider aspects of food safety, such as during the session on the Children’s Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE), and in particular its Regional Priority Goal 4 (exposure to hazardous chemicals).

10. In addition, the EEHC recommended that the Secretariat should explore with EFSA the best way of covering the subject in a side event or satellite session, possibly focusing on capacity-building with regard to detection of food contaminants and exchange of experience between the eastern and western parts of the WHO European Region. While endorsing an intersectoral approach to food safety, the EEHC cautioned against taking up the subject as a separate major component of the Conference programme or in the context of climate change.

**The future of the Environment and Health process in Europe**

11. Dr Lucianne Licari recalled that, before the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Budapest, Hungary, 23–25 June 2004), the EEHC had established an international steering committee to carry out an assessment of the Environment and Health process in Europe and make recommendations on the future. The resulting working paper had been welcomed by ministers and representatives attending the Conference, and the Budapest Declaration included sections on the future of the process and the role of the EEHC.

12. In preparation for the Fifth Ministerial Conference, the Chairperson of the Declaration Drafting Group had undertaken to collect the views of members of the EEHC prior to presenting them to participants in the Third High-level Preparatory Meeting. Since she, too, was unable to attend the present session, the EEHC was asked
whether the item should remain on the agenda of the High-level Preparatory Meeting and, if so, how it should be handled.

13. The EEHC suggested that the Drafting Group should choose a member of the group to serve as Vice-Chairperson. It agreed that the item on the future of the Environment and Health process in Europe should be kept on the agenda of the Third High-level Preparatory Meeting for discussion the following day. It requested the Secretariat to record the views expressed by participants in that discussion, so that they could be transmitted to the Chairperson of the Declaration Drafting Group and considered at the Group’s next meeting in Andorra on 16 and 17 June 2009. A consolidated position paper could then be prepared, forwarded to members of the EEHC and, if appropriate, reflected in a subsequent draft of the Declaration. To that end, the EEHC recommended that the discussion the following day should take the form of a “brainstorming” session, structured around four questions:

• What had worked well in the process following Budapest Conference?
• What had not worked?
• How could the process be improved, with the aim of supporting implementation of the declaration due to be adopted at the Fifth Ministerial Conference in Parma?
• What organizational structure or body (e.g. similar to the European Environment and Health Committee – EEHC) should follow up the process?

14. In anticipation of that discussion, the EEHC believed that cooperation between the environment and health sectors at international level was essential and should continue; that in future the process should allow for differentiated approaches at subregional level, while maintaining a comprehensive regional standpoint for the purposes of integration; and that it would be essential to work more closely with all stakeholders.

**Dates of future sessions of the EEHC**

15. On receipt of the consolidated position paper on the future of the Environment and Health process in Europe, the EEHC would decide when it needed to hold its next session. The alternate co-Chair extended an invitation to the EEHC to hold a session in Parma in October 2009.
Annex 1

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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