PHA PARTICIPATION AT THE WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

- meeting between People's Health Assembly representatives and WHO DG

A meeting between the representatives of the People's Health Assembly and the WHO Director-General Ms Gro Harlem Brundtland was held on 18 May 2001 on the occasion of the World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland. Zafrullah Chowdhury, Mira Shiva, Pam Zinkin, Maria Zuniga and Mike Rowson were present there on behalf of the PHA. Ms Gro Harlem Brundtland, David Nabarro (Chef de Cabinet), Anarfi Asmoah-Baah (Head of External Relations) and Eva Wallstam (Director of new civil society initiative) were present for WHO. Maria Zuniga opened the meeting by thanking the WHO DG for agreeing to meet the representatives of the PHA. Maria commented positively about the Civil Society Initiative aimed at improving WHO's relationships with NGOs and other civil society actors. DG said that she had initiated this project in order to scale up and systematise WHO's response to NGOs.

Zafrullah Chowdhury summarized the success of the PHA – the process had included more than 5,000 meetings and 1,500 people had gathered in Bangladesh. The grassroots had mobilized themselves to fight for Health for All.

DG said that events such as the WTO ministerial meeting at Seattle, USA and the battle over the revised drug strategy in 1998 had also shown the power of the civil society voice. Pam Zinkin presented the Charter in 20 different languages and said that new versions were arriving almost everyday and emphasized that this type of work was being undertaken without funding, underlining the commitment of civil society to carrying forward the PHA process.

Mike Rowson said that the main political messages to arise from the Assembly were that: (1) Health for All and Comprehensive Primary Health Care should be the fundamental principles, which guide international health policy; and

(2) there was great concern about the ability of WHO to stand up to the forces of globalization, in terms of analysing the health impact of global economic change and in terms of the role of WHO in relation to other global institutions such as WTO, The World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

DG said that she would not use the words 'stand up' to describe what WHO should be doing: it had to be remembered that WHO is an organization of member states and must work with that in mind. WHO should use its expertise to contribute to the evidence-base on these problems.

She then said that it is important to look broadly at what is happening with globalization and human rights as well as the divisions between people, the inequities and the differences in accessibility and to see where there are weaknesses in order to make an impact. WHO had started putting a stronger emphasis on the human rights issue and the need for better distribution of health care in developing countries. She has asked WHO representatives (WRs) to work to achieve these goals.

Zafrullah added that what we meant by 'stand up' is for WHO to take stronger position in favour of developing countries in the face of the globalization process.

DG said that the Department of Health in Sustainable Development had been systematically addressing the global institutions in its work. WHO now had observer status on the TRIPS Council.









Coordinating Group of the PHA: Asian Community Health Action Network (ACHAN);
Consumers International (CI); Dag Hammarskjold Foundation (DHF); Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK);
Health Action International (HAI); International People's Health Council (IPHC);
Third World Network (TWN); Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR)



Post-Assembly

DG asked whether we had seen the World Health Report 2000. She argued that it was an attempt to make health systems transparent and accountable.

Zafrullah noted that many of WHO's messages do not reach the community level and that there needed to be greater attention paid to how regional and national offices of WHO undertook this work. For example, the WRs should be informed about the PHA process. There also needed to be much greater attention to making sure that health ministers listened to WHO.

Mira Shiva emphasised the need to place representatives of civil society on strategic WHO committees in order to balance the role of commercial interest groups. DG replied that this would be one of the issues looked at by the Civil Society Initiative.

WHO's Civil Society Initiative: Ms Brundtland announced on 11 May 2001 a new initiative 'to improve WHO's relation with the civil society'. The initiative will be placed in the external relations department and led by Eva Wallstam (former head of Health in Sustainable Development, which is now called Health in Development and headed by Andrew Cassels). Margareta SkÖld will join Eva's team and they will probably employ others. The task is to develop within the coming year a plan on how the relationships could be improved. Eva and Maga are keen to hear any suggestions from our side. They will start by mid-June and probably set up a website to facilitate dialogue. During the WHA the PHA representatives had several talks with both Eva and Maga. NGO-accreditation and developing links (especially with WHO representatives at regional and country level)

were among the points. The initiative is very much welcomed, but should not become a one-off exercise. Eva Wallstam's recent speech on 'Civil Society Initiative' needs to be carefully examined. PHA have to decide how we are going to relate with this 'Initiative'. We need concrete suggestions from the PHA participants to develop the strategy. If anybody is interested to have the copy of Eva's speech, please let the PHA Secretariat know it.

PHA at WHO NGO Forum for Health: Besides disseminating the Charter to the delegates and Ministers, and discussions on PHA follow-up, e.g., in Africa, a presentation on PHA was held on 15 May 2001, in the final session of the NGO Forum for Health meeting chaired by Dr Eric Ram. The spirit of the PHA was brought forward to this well attended meeting. There were presentations of Zafrullah Chowdhury, Bala, Pam Zinkin, Claudio Schuftan and many others. Maria Zuniga facilitated the meeting. They shared information on the PHA process, the main messages of the People's Charter for Health. Examples of follow-up activities in the different regions were given and the BBC World service video was shown.

UPMRC prize: The Union of Palestine Medical Relief Committees received the United Arab Emirates Health Foundation Prize from WHO for their work in Primary Health Care. The prize was presented to Mustafa Barghouthi and it means a great honor to and support for UPMRC.

Post-PHA Activities

ASIA

Nepal: "People's Health National Coordinating Committee, Nepal" has been formed to undertake post-PHA activities in Nepal. Professor Mathura Prasad Shrestha is the convener of the committee and Shanta Lall Mulmi is its General Secretary. The newly formed National Committee has decided to organize a national consultative meeting on the 19th August 2001 in Kathmundu. The Committee has invited PHA Global Secretariat to take part in the consultative meeting.

Sri Lanka: Seven Regional Seminars were held in Sri Lanka since the last People's Health Assembly held in Savar, Bangladesh. A National People's Health Assembly has been planned to be held on 1st September 2001 at Malabe, Sri Lanka.

ARAB COUNTRIES

Arab Countries: The Arabic version of the People's Charter for Health has been published already.

A booklet on the Charter in English, French and Arabic has been also published. The booklet is available at UPMRC's website www.upmrc.org, in PDF or Word format. It will also be available on the PHA website when it is operational again. Copies of the two publications will be disseminated to the UPMRC partners and they will be asked to hold national workshops to promote the Charter.

In **Palestine**, a small workshop will be held for the people who were invited to the PHA Assembly 2000 in Bangladesh, and discussions will be held on the Charter. A national

meeting of the interested NGOs will also be organized. It has been planned that the Charter will be further promoted through the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), of which UPMRC is an active member. Meetings will be held with the Government Ministries to promote the document. In addition, UPMRC has decided to distribute the Charter to many of their international partners and funders, and lobby with them to accept the Charter as part of their work in the Middle East and throughout the world. It has also planned to ask its partners and funders to utilize their networks and contacts through the world, particularly in their region, to generate support. It has succeeded to get the Charter on the agenda of the regional meeting of the Arab Forum for Health and Social Studies that will be held in Beirut in November 2001. The meeting is expected to help make new contacts and garner further support for the PHA movement.

AFRICA

Tanzania: Ifakara International Health Research Centre, where research on Malaria disease is being carried out, is interested to do post-PHA activities in Tanzania on the basis of the People's Charter for Health. The director of the Research Centre is ready to collaborate with the PHA activists in Africa to undertake any activity there. The touchiest issues for any part of Africa are HIV and Safe Motherhood. Focus is being given on these issues. The PHA participants in Africa think that the People's Charter for Health is a starting point for them.

Kenya: As part of post-PHA activities in Africa, Consumer

Activities

Information Network (CIN), an independent non-profit national consumers' organization in Kenya, have come up with the following decisions: 1) CIN will enhance her activities on PHA at the local, sub-regional, regional and global scenes; 2) CIN will initiate dialogue and networking amongst the organizations and individuals working/involved in PHA activities locally and regionally; and 3) CIN will support and promote effective participation of Africa in PHA activities. They have the desire to promote and advance the objectives of the PHA and the vision and the aim of the People's Charter for Health as the fundamental prerequisite to human development. They will develop simple brochures both in English and Kiswahili and use cartoons and other illustrations as may be necessary.

THE AMERICAS

All over the **Americas** people are discussing the PHA and what happened in Savar, Dhaka. There have been local and regional meetings to discuss the People's Charter for Health and determine in which ways it might be applied to the present situations in many distinct communities.

In Latin America, the Regional Committee for the Promotion of Community Health (Mexico, Central America, and the Dominican Republic) have prepared a three-year plan for the Committee which includes intensive follow-up of the PHA at community, national, and regional levels. Later this year, the RCPCH will hold a region-wide encounter on Health and Globalization. In the meantime, the participants from the region are carrying out activities to raise awareness in their respective organizations, communities and countries. In Jamaica, copies of the Charter are being used to promote the PHA there. A proposal on the 'lamaican People's Health Assembly' is

there. A proposal on the 'Jamaican People's Health Assembly' is being produced to be presented to the University of the West Indies. It is a collaborative proposal to the Ministry of Health.

EUROPE

health care facilities.

France: Lucien Bigeault and Dr Didier Patte who attended the PHA event at Savar, Dhaka gave a presentation of the PHA to some of Public Health department professors and students of Medical College Bichat in Paris. The head of this department is Professor Marc Brodin who is also a member of the PHA Committee in Paris. A copy of the 'People's Charter for Health' was sent to Professor Claude Jasmin, president of ICGPH organizing the 4th Congress on Global Health Equity at UNESCO. He has called Lucien over telephone by asking him to send them names of the members desiring to participate in this congress so that they could send Lucien and others invitations. Lucien may accompany Professor Marc Brodin. Russia: Lidia Simbirtseva, a participant of the PHA 2000 event, chaired the big conference having 150 persons as participants, on "Availability of Health Care in St Petersburg", which was conducted by political movement "Power of St Petersburg". It was a great chance to present once more the People's Health Assembly ideology and documents. The People's Charter for Health, documents on The Global Fund, PHA representatives' meeting with WHO DG Ms Brundtland and her letter with GS UN and The World Bank Director to G8 heads were presented and discussed with big enthusiasm at the conference. The all city population elects fifty persons of the Legislative Assembly of St Petersburg. Many of them were present at the conference on 19 June 2001. Mr Sergey Mironov, Vice-Chairman of the Legislative Assembly of St Petersburg and in the same time, Senator of the upper chamber Parliament in Moscow was also present there. Twenty-five persons work in the Council without salary; many of them are professors in the research institutions and leaders of big

Who to contact?

CONTACT the **Regional Coordinators** at your respective regions/countries to get into the PHA loop!

Africa

Norman Nyazema, CI ROAF, 11 Connaught Road, Avondale, Harare, Zimbabwe; tel: 263-4-302 283; fax: 263-4-303 092; email: nnyazema@healthnet.zw

Arab Region

Dr Jihad Mashal, UPMRC

PO Box 51483, Jerusalem, Tel.: +972-2-583-4021

Fax: +972-2-583-0679 E-mail: jihad@shabaka.net

South Africa

David Sanders, IPHC, University of Western Cape, P Bag X17, Bellville 7535, South Africa. fax: 27-21-959 2809; email: lmartin@uwc.ac.za

Asia

Prem Chandran John, ACHAN, Post Bag 1404, Madras 600 105, India; tel: 91-44-823 1556; fax: 91-44-827 0424; email: achan@eth.net

Southeast Asia

Edelina de la Paz, ACHAN, 201C M Recto St, Barangay Addition Hills, San Juan, Metro Manila, Philippines; tel: 63-2-726 8977; fax: 63-2-726 2682 email: hain@phil.gn.apc.org

Europe

Pam Zinkin, MEDACT/IPHC, 4/45 Anson Road, London N7 0AR, United Kingdom; tel: 44-207-609 1005; fax: 44-207-700 2699; email: pamzinkin@gn.apc.org

Pacific

Mary Murray, 42 Urambi Village, Crozier Circuit, Kambah ACT 2902, Australia; tel: 61-26-231 7746; fax: 61-26-296 2530; email: memhmh@ozemail.com.au

Ken Harvey, School of Public Health, La Trobe University, Bundoora, 2083, Australia tel: 61-3-9479 1750; fax: 61-3-9379 1783 email: k.harvey@latrobe.edu.au

Latin America

Maria Hamlin Zuniga, IPHC, Apartado #3267, Managua, Nicaragua; tel: 505-2-662 225; fax: 505-2-662 225; email: iphc@cisas.org.ni

Arturo Quizphe, Faculty of Medical Science, University of Cuenca, Casilla, Postal 01-051876 Calle Chile 1-85, URB. Senderos, Cuenca - Ecuador tel: 593-7-841 865; fax: 593-7-841 865 email: aquizhpe@yahoo.com

PHA EUROPE MEETING

The PHA Europe Meeting was held on 4 April 2001 in London, where countries represented were Sweden, Italy, France, the Netherlands, Scotland, and UK. Dr Qasem Chowdhury from PHA Secretariat in Bangladesh and Maria Zuniga from Nicaragua were invited to the meeting as special guests. A number of actions and responsibilities were agreed in the meeting. It was decided in the meeting that Europe PHA e-group should be consolidated and enlarged. There are now 65 names on the Europe PHA e-group. Its address is PHA-Europe@egroups.com. Currently the e-group deals with news and events. To

subscribe, send an e-mail to PHA-Europe-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. It was also decided to promote awareness of the Charter/PHA. The following points were discussed in the meeting: what should we do as a region; how do we use the Charter; what should we take at the global level; suggested actions; building a movement; and structure. They decided to present the PHA at this year's WHA and demanded greater civil society involvement in WHO activities; to focus on WHA in May 2002; and to target Rio plus 10 in Johannesburg and UN Financing for Development Conference in Mexico City in March 2002.

PHA CHARTER PRESENTATION AT UNESCO

The Congress on Global Health Equity was held at UNESCO on 25-27 June, 2001, in Paris, France, where Noble Laureate Professor Amartya Sen and Dr Mohammad Yunus of Grameen Bank gave their presentations. Lucien Bigeault, a participant of the PHA 2000 from France, was invited to give a presentation on PHA at the Congress. He gave a presentation on PHA at a workshop on 26 June 2001, where the Civil Society and NGOs group joined the government and inter-governmental organizations group. During the workshop, 70 copies of the PHA Charter (People's Charter for Health) were distributed among the participants there. The International Council for Global Health Progress (ICGHP) presented a paper at the Congress at UNESCO. In the Congress paper the mission of ICGHP has been mentioned as follows, "the aim of ICGHP is to contribute to a new global vision and approach of health which are deemed to be increasingly needed. This body is interested in the equality of life of men and women of all ages. Its mission is to elaborate international recommendations in order to take part in the improvement of health the world over." Lucien Bigeault observed that the problem of ICGHP is that they are working with "experts", who are far from the ordinary people. He felt that they certainly need to have their experts confronted to the civil society.

If undelivered, please return to: PHA Secretariat Gonoshasthaya Kendra PO. Mirzanagar, Savar Dhaka 1344, Bangladesh

PHA FINANCE GROUP AND STRATEGY MEETING

The PHA Finance Group and Strategy Meeting was held on 2nd and 3rd April 2001 in London, UK. Dr Qasem Chowdhury, Alifia Chakera, Olle Nordberg, Andy Rutherford, Pam Zinkin, Maria Zuniga were present at the meeting. At the beginning Qasem gave a brief overview of the present arrangement and activity of the PHA Secretariat. Later he and Andy Rutherford presented a brief report on the financial matters. Some budget items were under expended due to increase of own contribution. But other areas were higher than budgeted, especially food and accommodation due to participation of more people. Overall there is still a deficit budget. At the meeting a number of actions were decided, such as, Olle would ask for release of remaining US\$30,000 from the Dutch Government; Andy would make claim from DFID for balance fund; WSM would make claim fund from the Belgian Government. The revised tentative budget for the period 1st April 2001 to 31 March 2002 was done there. It was agreed in the meeting that we must look for new donors. Olle would present requests for funds based on the new budget to SIDA, Dutch Government and the Rockefeller Foundation. Andy would try to raise fund from other donors. Some seed money had to be kept for the next budget for different countries/regions. It was decided at the London meeting that the provisional list of the participants at the PHA-2000 event should be completed by May 2001. A total of 1,500 copies of the list will be printed for the participants with a request to amend errors when seen. Everybody was pleased with the format of the Charter with an introduction. Copies can be ordered from the secretariat. Qasem proposed to request those organizations that have websites to put the Charter in their websites. During the discussion Secretariat was asked to send letter/e-mail asking initial PHA organisers for their level of commitment, and who are they representing. A five-member reference group was formed to help the PHA Secretariat in advisory capacity till 31 December 2001. The members of the group are Pam, Maria, Olle, Prem and Andy.

It was decided to hold the PHA follow-up meeting in October 2001 and the venue is Savar.

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