



Western Pacific

# WHO hosts dialogue on climate change and health

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The World Health Organization (WHO) Asia-Pacific Centre for Environment and Health in the Western Pacific Region hosted a dialogue with residents of Seoul, including students of the Graduate School of Public Health of Seoul National University where the event took place.

International experts from WHO and leading Korean scientists spoke with young people about threats to health posed by pollution and climate change and priority actions to address them.

Dr Marco Martuzzi, Head of the WHO Asia-Pacific Centre for Environment and Health in the Western Pacific Region, said: "Every single hour, 400 people die in our Region due to environmental factors. These are all tragedies, and they are largely preventable. If our environment was healthier – if air, water and soil were cleaner, and work environments were healthier, millions of people could live longer, better lives."

Environmental health experts highlighted the wide-ranging impacts of environmental pollution and climate change on health. These include mental health and other chronic conditions such as heart and lung disease, stroke and cancer, to diseases such as dengue and malaria which are spread by mosquitoes and affect increasing large populations due to changing climate and environmental factors.

Speakers also stressed the health impact and the huge costs of increasingly common extreme weather events such as floods, hurricanes and heatwaves. If current trends continue, an estimated 250 000 additional deaths are expected globally each year from 2030. All people in the Western Pacific Region are affected, but some bear a disproportionate burden. For example, the small island states in the Pacific are highly vulnerable to rising sea levels, which, combined with limited or

vulnerable infrastructure, can have devastating consequences for people's health and livelihoods. Access to safe water – not available to all in some countries – is another striking example of inequalities.

Climate change and the environment is one of four strategic priorities for WHO's work in the Western Pacific Region. WHO is firmly committed to supporting all Member States to respond to these challenges, using innovative approaches.

“The generous support of the Republic of Korea's Ministry of Environment and the Seoul Metropolitan Government is enabling us to ramp up our support to countries, by hosting and financing the Asia-Pacific Centre for Environment and Health in Seoul. The Centre will gather state-of-the-art evidence, mobilize experts and establish a science-informed dialogue with decision makers and other stakeholders. Thanks to the Centre, WHO will advocate more forcefully for health-friendly environmental policies,” said Dr Takeshi Kasai, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific.

The Centre benefits greatly from the engagement of leading researchers in the Republic of Korea and the Region at large. The Centre will contribute to public debate on environment and health, raising awareness and providing impartial information on what governments, communities, families and individuals can do to protect health in a changing environment.

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## Notes to editors

The WHO Asia-Pacific Centre for Environment and Health in the Western Pacific Region is hosted by the Republic of Korea in office space provided by the City of Seoul, at 38 jongro, jongro-gu, Seoul, 110-110.

The work of the Centre cuts across three key areas, in line with relevant Sustainable Development Goals:

- **Air quality, energy and health**—addressing the health impact of air pollution and energy policy, focusing on transboundary air pollution including haze in South-East Asia and dust and sandstorms in North-East Asia, in line with the target of reducing deaths from air pollution by 5% by 2023.
- **Climate change and health**—helping to build climate-resilient health systems in vulnerable countries and areas, including Pacific islands, to support achievement of the target of reducing deaths from climate-sensitive diseases by 10% by 2023.

- **Water and the living environment**—addressing chemical safety, healthy and safe transport, environmental noise, water, sanitation, hygiene and wastewater to reduce the burden of environmental diseases and injuries and increase access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation.

The Centre is a key instrument to implement the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific's *For the Future* vision, which identifies the health impacts of climate and environmental change as a top priority. It also supports the objectives of the Western Pacific Regional Framework for Action on Health and Environment on a Changing Planet, endorsed by Member States in 2016, as well as the Declarations on Environment and Health of Regional Ministerial Forums held in Jeju in 2010, Kuala Lumpur in 2013 and Manila in 2016.

The 37 countries and areas of the WHO Western Pacific Region are: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Fiji, France (which has responsibility for French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna), Hong Kong SAR (China), Japan, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Macao SAR (China), Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (which has responsibility for Pitcairn Islands), the United States of America (which has responsibility for American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands), Vanuatu and Viet Nam.

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