

Global Health Community Calls for Climate Action Ahead of COP26 to Avert “Biggest Health Threat Facing Humanity”

WHO Report Calls for Ambitious Climate Commitments as the only Path to Long-Term Recovery from Pandemic

Geneva, 11 October 2021 - The *Philippine Journal of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery* joined more than 300 organizations representing at least **45 million nurses, doctors and health professionals worldwide – about three quarters of the global health workforce** – and signed an open letter to the 197 government leaders and national delegations ahead of the UN climate conference (COP26) in Glasgow, UK, warning that the climate crisis is the single biggest health threat facing humanity, and calling on world leaders to deliver on climate action.¹

The letter's publication coincided with the October 11, 2021 release of a **new report** by the World Health Organization (WHO), which argues that countries can only ensure a long-term recovery from the pandemic by implementing ambitious climate commitments. The report delivers ten high-level recommendations, backed up by action points, resources and case studies, including the need to place health and social justice at the heart of the UN climate talks.²

The letter states: “Wherever we deliver care, in our hospitals, clinics and communities around the world, we are already responding to the health harms caused by climate change.” It further says “Those people and nations who have benefited most from the activities that caused the climate crisis, especially fossil fuel extraction and use, have a great responsibility to do everything possible to help those who are now most at risk.”

José Florencio Lapeña, Editor-in-Chief of the *Philippine Journal of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery* echoed the statement:

“Wildfires, flooding, heatwaves and droughts impacting people’s health have been on the rise around the world, compounding other health challenges such as the pandemic. In the Philippines, we are already seeing heightened El Niño and La Niña phenomena, with flooding and rising sea levels.

By integrating health and equity into climate policy, the Philippines has the opportunity to protect peoples’ health, maximize returns on investments, and build public support for the urgently needed responses from governments to the climate crisis.”

Both the letter and the report argue that health and equity must be at the center of climate change response; while the letter calls for action, the report provides the blueprint for delivering climate action that will protect the health of people around the world.

The letter, which has been signed by diverse medical organizations and high profile individuals, such as WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the World Medical Association, the International Council of Nurses and Doctors for



Extinction Rebellion Switzerland, calls on all governments to update their national climate commitments under the Paris Agreement, in line with their fair share of limiting warming to 1.5°C. A recent report by UN Climate Change (UNFCCC) found that countries' collective climate commitments are falling far short of this goal, and would lead to a global temperature rise of at least 2.7°C by the end of the century.^{3,4}

The 45 million health professionals represented in the letter are demanding a rapid and just transition away from fossil fuels; for high income countries to provide the promised transfer of climate funds; for investments in resilient and low carbon

health systems; and for pandemic recovery investments to support climate action and reduce social and health inequities.

The signatories of the open letter represent every region of the world, and include the International Council of Nurses, the World Medical Association, the International Federation of Medical Students Associations, the International Confederation of Midwives, the International Pediatrics Association as well as the *Philippine Journal of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery*. See full list of signatories at: <https://healthyclimateletter.net/signatories/>

End Notes:

1. More information on the #HealthyClimate Prescription letter is available at: <https://healthyclimateletter.net>
2. **The WHO report "The Health Argument for Climate Action" is available at: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/climate-change>. As part of key climate action, the report recommends to:**
 - place health and social justice at the heart of the UN climate talks, prioritizing those climate interventions with the largest health-, social- and economic gains;
 - guide a rapid transition to renewable energy, to save lives from air pollution, particularly from coal combustion, ensuring energy security for health care facilities, and end energy poverty;
 - promote sustainable, healthy urban design and transport systems, with improved land-use, access to public space, and priority for walking, cycling and public transport;
 - promote sustainable food supply chains and more nutritious diets that deliver on both climate and health outcomes;
 - finance a transition towards a wellbeing economy;
 - mobilize and support the health community on climate action. <https://www.who.int/health-topics/climate-change>
3. Climate Action Tracker, Fair Share: <https://climateactiontracker.org/methodology/cat-rating-methodology/fair-share/>
4. UNFCCC, Nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement, 17 September 2021, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2021_08_adv_1.pdf

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