



IFMSA POLICY STATEMENT

Climate Change and Health

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Summary

The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) represents 1.2 million medical students from over 100 countries across the globe.

We, the 62nd General Assembly of the IFMSA, reaffirm our belief in the preservation of public health and equality across all populations regardless of gender, race and culture. We acknowledge climate change as the largest threat to global health in the 21st century, and call for human health to be placed at the centre of the United Nations Framework for Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC) international negotiations where it will stand as an effective framework from which to build a fair, ambitious and legally binding global deal. In this, we seek to preserve a society which promotes equality, avoid future conflicts and environmental refugees, and safeguard the right to health for all countries and all peoples.

Introduction

Following the UNFCCC's COP15/CMP5 in Copenhagen, there exists universal political, scientific and public health consensus that climate change is both man-made and occurring at unprecedented rates, posing a very significant threat to the health of global populations¹.

Although the political forces are moving slowly, there is still some progress on global action to address climate change. The latest testament to this is the recommitment to the second period of Kyoto Protocol in CMP8 and the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP) from COP17.



Disturbances in climate stability will severely harm the health of individuals and communities through extreme weather events, natural disasters, floods and resulting diarrheal disease, degradation of arable land, nutritional impacts, mass migration, violent conflict and widened areas of diseases such as malaria and dengue fever².

Changes to the climate resulting in water scarcity and decreased sanitation alone will have devastating effects on public health systems in affected areas.

Main Text

We acknowledge the significant co-benefits to health of mitigation strategies. These benefits include developments in areas of transport, agriculture, electricity generation and household energy use³. As future health professionals we acknowledge our duty of care to our patients, our communities, and therefore the prevention of climate change as a recognized threat to global public health.

We support the policy position of the WHO in regards to climate change and health, the Climate Health Council's Prescription for a Healthy Planet and the 4th assessment report of the IPCC^{2, 4}.

The IFMSA affirms its stance that:

1. Climate change, particularly global warming, is directly attributable to human activity.
2. Climate change is the largest threat to global health in the 21st century.
3. The impacts of climate change will affect the world's most disadvantaged populations earlier and most severely.
4. Immediate and sustainable mitigation and adaptation action must be taken on a local, national and global level if we are to safeguard global public health.
5. The costs associated with climate change must be shared fairly between nations, with regard for the disparity of consequence and responsibility.
6. Health must be placed at the centre of any international negotiations on climate change for a global deal.
7. The international health community must actively engage in the debate and negotiation progress taking place under the UNFCCC.
8. Health professionals as individuals and their representative organizations must take an external advocacy role in pushing their local governments and health ministers to act in a way that reduces national emissions.



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9. The medical profession has a key practical and advocacy role in preventing climate change and preparing for its likely consequences for health.
10. The 2011 Durban Platform for Enhanced Action is inadequate in face of the global threat of catastrophic climate change, and negotiations under the UNFCCC should continue as swiftly as possible, with the aim of achieving a meaningful global agreement.

In light of the above stance and recent events, the IFMSA calls for:

1. The peak of global CO₂ emissions by 2015.
2. A cap on greenhouse gas emissions such that the atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ stabilise at 350 ppm.
3. A global temperature increase of no more than 1.5 degrees based on pre-industrial level, ensuring the safety of our eco-systems and the health of vulnerable populations.
4. A minimum global reduction in greenhouse gas emissions based on 1990 levels of 80%, by 2050.
5. A strengthening of the adaptive capacity of vulnerable countries to minimize the adverse impacts of climate change, with adequate financial support from high income countries.
6. Every national health sector to decrease their own emissions through a reduction in energy consumption, new technologies and improved waste management.
7. A fair international negotiation process under the UNFCCC, in which the rights of every country and their peoples are respected and represented equally.
8. Medical students, practitioners as individuals, and organizations representing the interests of medical students and practitioners to take the lead in educating the public on the likely effects of climate change on health, as well as directly lobbying key stakeholders including governments, to take action on the issue.
9. The integration of climate change and its threat to health within the curricula of medical schools worldwide.
10. The investment of time, effort and finances into mechanisms which create real rather than theoretical carbon reductions.

The IFMSA calls for what science and justice demands of the global community - a reduction of carbon emissions to levels which ensure the survival of our planet's eco-system and the protection of human health.



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References

1. The Kyoto Protocol http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php
2. The Climate and Health Council – <http://www.climateandhealth.org>
3. Haines A, et al. (2009). Impact on public health of strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions: overview and implications for policymakers. *Lancet*. DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(09)67159-1.
4. 4th Assessment Report. Geneva: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; 2007.

