

# | MEETING REPORT |



All for Equity

## World Conference on Social Determinants of Health

RIO DE JANEIRO | BRAZIL | 19–21 OCTOBER 2011



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World Health  
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# FOREWORD

**G**lobalization was purported to be the rising tide that would lift all boats. However, the reality has been that it lifted the big boats but tended to sink or swamp many smaller ones. Globalization and the international systems that govern the way our highly interdependent and interconnected world works have no rules that ensure the fair distribution of growth and benefits. Consequently, the differences, within and between countries, in income levels, in opportunities, in health status and in access to care, are greater today than at any time in recent history.

A world that is greatly out of balance in matters of health is neither stable nor secure. The Constitution of the World Health Organization states that "Governments have a responsibility for the health of their peoples which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health and social measures." However, far too many governments are challenged in fulfilling this basic duty. The credibility of governments in the eyes of their citizens is at stake.

In 2008, the Commission on Social Determinants of Health released its final report. At the 2009 World Health Assembly, Member States adopted resolution WHA62.14 "Reducing health inequities through action on the social determinants of health". Since then many countries have been increasing efforts to implement action on social determinants to address inequity. Nevertheless, there is an urgent need to build upon and accelerate these efforts.

The World Conference on Social Determinants of Health, convened by WHO, was a landmark event held in accordance with resolution WHA62.14. The World Conference aimed to share experiences on how to address the challenges posed by health inequities and to mobilize commitment to the urgent implementation of feasible actions on social determinants in all countries, with the goals of improving health, reducing health inequities and promoting development.

The extent and level of support that the World Conference received demonstrated the increasing understanding among governments, international organizations, civil society and other sectors of the importance and urgency in taking forward this agenda. More than 1000 participants attended the World Conference, including delegates from 125 Member States, representatives from other organizations in the United Nations system and civil society, and technical experts. In addition, the event was followed through webcast by more than 19 000 people.

On 21 October 2011, Member States adopted the Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health at the World Conference, pledging to work towards reducing health inequities and promoting development by taking action across the five priority areas discussed at the conference.

I would like to extend my deepest thanks to the Government of Brazil for hosting and funding the World Conference, in particular the Brazilian Ministry of Health, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz). I would like to sincerely thank the Advisory Group, who provided technical and strategic support on various aspects of the conference. I would also like to thank the World Conference organizing committee for their commitment and hard work in making the World Conference a success. Finally, I would like to thank all our Member States, many of them represented by ministers, the numerous civil society organizations, academia and everyone who attended the World Conference and contributed their ideas, energy and passion.

This meeting report summarizes and synthesizes the proceedings and outcomes of the World Conference on Social Determinants of Health and has been prepared in consultation with key partners and stakeholders. I sincerely hope that it will support and foster the continuing discussions and activity following on from the World Conference.

We know that, in all countries and in all contexts, it is possible to take action on social determinants of health to improve health, reduce health inequities and promote development. We now have the political commitment to do so in the Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health. We know what we need to do and how to go about it: now is the time for increased action.



*Margaret Chan*  
Director General



# SUMMARY

The World Conference on Social Determinants of Health (World Conference), 19–21 October 2011, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, was convened by the World Health Organization and hosted by the Government of Brazil.

The World Conference was held in accordance with World Health Assembly resolution WHA62.14 “Reducing health inequities through action on the social determinants of health” (2009) and followed the work and publication of the final report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health (2008).

The World Conference aimed:

- to identify the basic principles, methods and strategies for developing national action plans to address social determinants of health to reduce health inequities;
- to strengthen political commitment by Member States to develop and implement such national action plans, as well as the provisions of resolution WHA62.14;
- to share experiences, challenges and technical knowledge on how to address social determinants of health and construct national plans to reduce health inequities, considering the need for strengthening of governance arrangements, and learning from different contexts.

Over 1000 participants attended, including delegates from 125 Member States, representatives from other organizations in the United Nations system and civil society, and technical experts. In addition, more than 19 000 people followed the event through webcast.

On 21 October 2011, Member States adopted the Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health at the World Conference, pledging to work towards reducing health inequities and promoting development by taking action across the five priority areas discussed at the conference. The Rio Political Declaration expresses global political commitment for the implementation of a “social determinants of health approach” and is expected to build momentum within countries for the development of dedicated national action plans and strategies.

The five priority areas were based on the five World Conference themes:

1. Governance to tackle the root causes of health inequities: implementing action on social determinants of health;
2. Promoting participation: community leadership for action on social determinants;
3. The role of the health sector, including public health programmes, in reducing health inequities;
4. Global action on social determinants: aligning priorities and stakeholders;
5. Monitoring progress: measurement and analysis to inform policies and build accountability on social determinants.

This meeting report summarizes and synthesizes the proceedings and outcomes of the World Conference on Social Determinants of Health.



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