

The Road to the United Nations High Level Meeting on Chronic Non-communicable Diseases

T Hassell¹, A Hennis²

ABSTRACT

The United Nations High Level Meeting (UNHLM) on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) will take place in New York on September 19 and 20, 2011. This historic event will focus world attention on the chronic non-communicable diseases (CNCDs) for the first time. In 2008, CNCDs, principally cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic lung diseases and diabetes, accounted for 63% (or 36 million) of the 57 million deaths occurring worldwide. Many of these deaths may be considered premature (involving 9.1 million persons aged less than 60 years), and around 80% of overall deaths occurred in low and middle income countries. Chronic non-communicable diseases are therefore a major cause of premature death, with resulting enormous negative impact on national economies and global development, while continuing to increase at worrying rates particularly in the developing world. Without successful interventions, NCD-related deaths are projected to reach 52 million by 2030.

Keywords: Caribbean community, CARICOM, United Nations High Level Meeting

El Camino hacia la Reunión de Alto de Nivel de las Naciones Unidas en Torno a las Enfermedades no Comunicables Crónicas

T Hassell¹, A Hennis²

RESUMEN

La Reunión de Alto de Nivel de las Naciones Unidas sobre las enfermedades no comunicables crónicas, tendrá lugar en Nueva York el 19 de septiembre de 2011, Este acontecimiento histórico centrará por primera vez la atención mundial sobre las enfermedades no comunicables (ENCs). En el año 2008, las enfermedades no comunicables crónicas – principalmente las enfermedades cardiovasculares, el cáncer, las enfermedades pulmonares crónicas, y la diabetes – representaron el 63% (o 36 millones) de los 57 millones de muertes ocurridas a nivel mundial. Muchas de estas muertes pueden ser consideradas prematuras (abarcando 9.1 millones de personas con menos de 60 años), y alrededor del 80% de las muertes en general ocurrieron en países de ingreso bajo o medio. Por lo tanto, en la actualidad, las enfermedades no comunicables crónicas constituyen una de las principales causas de muertes prematuras. Estas tienen como resultado un impacto negativo en las economías nacionales y el desarrollo global, mientras que continúan aumentando a un ritmo alarmante, especialmente en los países en vías de desarrollo. A menos que se produzcan intervenciones exitosas, las muertes por ENC se estima que alcanzarán la cifra de 52 millones para el año 2030.

Palabras claves: Comunidad caribeña, CARICOM, Reunión de Alto de Nivel de las Naciones Unidas.

West Indian Med J 2011; 60 (4): 384

From: ¹Barbados National Chronic Non-communicable Diseases Commission, Special Envoy for CNCDs, St Michael, Barbados, and ²Chronic Disease Research Centre, Tropical Medicine Research Institute, The University of the West Indies, Jemmott's Lane, Bridgetown, Barbados.

Correspondence: Professor A Hennis, Chronic Disease Research Centre, Tropical Medicine Research Institute, The University of the West Indies, Jemmott's Lane, Bridgetown, Barbados BB11115. E-mail: anselm.hennis@cavehill.uwi.edu

INTRODUCTION

The decision by the United Nations General Assembly to convene a high level meeting on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) presents a unique opportunity for the international community to take action against the epidemic, save millions of lives (1, 2) and enhance development initiatives. The goal of the United Nations High Level Meeting (UNHLM) is to increase funding and improve prevention and treatment of NCDs globally, with a particular focus on developmental, social and economic impacts, particularly as they affect developing countries.

The Caribbean community (CARICOM) has played a major role in the development of the UNHLM. A special summit of the CARICOM Heads of Government took place in Trinidad in 2007, and was convened to discuss the impact of NCDs on the people of the region. The meeting concluded with the issuance of the Port-of-Spain Declaration (3), a series of recommendations aimed at reducing the burden of NCDs by comprehensive and integrated preventive and control strategies through multisectoral, collaborative approaches in the region.

At a subsequent meeting in Trinidad and Tobago in 2009, Heads of Government of the Commonwealth issued a statement specifically affirming their commitment to addressing the burden of NCDs and also agreed to increase the ability of Commonwealth countries to respond to the emerging NCD crisis.

A significant milestone was achieved on May 13, 2010 when the United Nations General Assembly voted in favour of a UN Resolution [A/RES/64/265] (4) tabled by Trinidad and Tobago on behalf of CARICOM Member States, calling for the organization of a UNHLM on NCDs. The Permanent Representatives of Luxemburg and Jamaica have been appointed as the meeting's co-facilitators and will lead consultations with UN Member States. They will preside over the process of drafting the final outcome document to be agreed by Member States in the months leading up to the UNHLM.

This Resolution also requested the President of the General Assembly to organise an informal, interactive hearing with representatives of civil society. This hearing took place on 16 June, 2011 in New York, during which "the impact of NCDs on CARICOM countries and the response they have generated" was presented during a roundtable discussion. Sir George Alleyne, Director Emeritus, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/World Health Organization (WHO) and Chancellor of The University of the West Indies presented the closing remarks.

These recent developments were preceded by several commitments to the prevention and control of NCDs. These include:

- * The Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of NCDs, which recognised the tremendous global burden of the NCDs, underlying risks, potential

economic threats and the importance of prevention to reduce premature mortality and improve quality of life. This measure was adopted by the World Health Assembly in 2000 (5)

- * The Plan of Implementation adopted by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2002, which recognised the importance of poverty eradication, the need to change unsustainable global patterns of consumption and production and the requirement to manage and protect the natural resource base of economic and social development (6)
- * The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which was an evidence-based treaty developed in response to the globalisation of the tobacco epidemic, and was unprecedented in its approach as a regulatory strategy for tobacco control. This convention was adopted by the World Health Assembly in 2003 (7)
- * The Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, endorsed by the World Health Assembly in 2004, addressed the role of diet and exercise as key risk factors underpinning the global NCD epidemic (8)
- * The Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of NCDs, adopted by the World Health Assembly 2008 (9) and
- * The Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol, adopted by the World Health Assembly in 2010 (10)

As cited in the preliminary draft outcome document of the High Level Meeting on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (11), many other significant initiatives have led up to the UNHLM. These include the Ministerial declaration adopted at the 2009 high-level segment of the United Nations Economic and Social Council; the outcome declaration of the Fifth Summit of the Americas adopted in June 2009, and the recently held First Global Ministerial Conference on Healthy Lifestyles and Non-communicable Disease Control, organized by the Russian Federation and WHO in Moscow, in April 2011.

The draft outcome document also notes that the WHO, in collaboration with Member States, has also held several regional multisectoral consultations with the support of regional commissions and United Nations agencies, to provide inputs to the preparation for the UNHLM (11). These meetings have involved the member states in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region (Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, October 2010), the WHO European Region (Oslo, Norway, November 2010), the Pacific islands sub-region of the WHO Western Pacific Region (Nadi, Fiji, February 2011), the WHO Region of the Americas (Mexico City, Mexico, February 2011), the WHO South-East Asia Region (Jakarta, Indonesia, March 2011) and the Western Asian sub-

region of the WHO Western Pacific Region (Seoul, Republic of Korea, March 2011).

The occurrence of the UNHLM, only the second such meeting on health held by the United Nations, is yet another example of the “Caribbean punching above its weight”. It provides an excellent opportunity for a “whole of society” response in the Caribbean to a group of diseases that causes more sickness and death in the Caribbean than they do in any other region of the Americas and are a recognized threat to the further development of the Caribbean region. We, therefore, take this road with cautious optimism that there will be clear outcomes that will lead to a better tomorrow for all human kind, and particularly the Caribbean region.

REFERENCES

1. Alwan A, Maclean DR, Riley LM, d’Espaignet ET, Mathers CD, Stevens GA et al. Monitoring and surveillance of chronic non-communicable diseases: progress and capacity in high-burden countries. *Lancet* 2010; **376**: 1861–8.
2. World Health Organization. The global burden of disease: 2004 update. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2008.
3. Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat. Declaration of Port-of-Spain: Uniting to stop the epidemic of NCDs. [Accessed August 16, 2011]; Available from: http://www.caricom.org/jsp/communications/meetings_statements/declaration_port_of_spain_chronic_ncds.jsp
4. United Nations General Assembly Sixty-fourth session. Resolution A/RES/64/265 [Accessed August 16, 2011]; Available from: <http://esango.un.org/event/documents/ARES64265.pdf>
5. World Health Assembly (WHA 53.17) Prevention and control of non-communicable diseases. [Accessed August 16, 2011]; Available from: http://www.who.int/ncd/mip2000/documents/wha_53_17_en.pdf
6. United Nations. Plan of implementation of the world summit on sustainable development. [Accessed August 16, 2011]; Available from: http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/WSSD_POI_PD/English/WSSD_PlanImpl.pdf
7. World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. [Accessed August 16, 2011]; Available from: http://www.who.int/tobacco/framework/WHO_FCTC_english.pdf
8. World Health Organization. Global strategy on diet, physical activity and health. [Accessed August 16, 2011]; Available from: http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/strategy/eb11344/strategy_english_web.pdf
9. World Health Organization. 2008–2013 action plan for the global strategy for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases. [Accessed August 16, 2011]; Available from: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2009/9789241597418_eng.pdf
10. World Health Organization. Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol. [Accessed August 16, 2011]; Available from: http://www.searo.who.int/LinkFiles/Meeting_reports_GSRH-Alcohol.pdf
11. The draft outcome document of the High Level Meeting on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases. [Accessed August 16, 2011]; Available from: http://www.who.int/nmh/events/2011/introduction_doc.pdf