Poverty won't be history if health isn't included

Leading personalities such as Bono, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter, as well as 30 former heads of states, are backing the British Medical Association [BMA] and the Realising Rights: Ethical Globalization Initiative (EGI) in their call to world leaders that health must be central to any attempt to 'make poverty history'.

This call is one of the main recommendations in the Right to Health Call to Action1 being launched today [9 December] by the two organisations. They are calling for urgent action on health inequalities and call upon Governments to promote access to clean water, health care, adequate nutrition and sanitation without discrimination. This call to action is part of an on-going, global campaign to raise awareness about this issue.

Key speakers at the Right to Health seminar2 being held at BMA House today [9 December] include:

· Mary Robinson, President of Realizing Rights: the Ethical Globalization Initiative, former President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

· Paul Hunt, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health

· Dr Michael Wilks, Chairman, Medical Ethics Committee, British Medical Association

· Joy Phumaphi, Assistant Director-General, World Health Organisation [WHO]

· Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Chair of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health

· Dr David De Ferranti, Senior Fellow, UN Foundation

The President of EGI, Mary Robinson said today:

"On the eve of Human Rights Day 2005, we are calling for health to be made central to global attempts to reduce poverty. The fact that thirty thousand children die every day of easily preventable disease tells us why health care is fundamental to human rights, and to any serious attempt to help the world's poorest."

She added:

"World leaders who genuinely want to tackle the problems of poverty in Africa must put health at the top of the agenda. This does not mean building high tech health systems over night but it does mean ensuring everyone has access to clean water and adequate nutrition."

Dr Michael Wilks, Chairman of the BMA Ethics Committee, commented:

"Inequalities in global health present the world with one of its starkest ethical challenges. It is unacceptable that life expectancy in rich countries is approaching 80, while in the poorest it is under 40. Nor can we accept a world in which children living in the poorest countries are ten times more likely to die before they reach the age of five than their affluent western counterparts."

"The BMA, in association with Essex University and the Ethical Globalization Initiative is launching this call to action to draw attention to this intolerable divide. Given the clear link between poverty and poor health, the BMA, in association with its partners, is working to ensure that the significance of health is reflected in global poverty reduction and development strategies."

Paul Hunt, UN human rights independent expert on the right to the highest attainable standard of health, added:

"In the UK, 100% of the population have access to safe drinking water - in Cambodia the figure is only 34%. In the UK, 99% of babies are delivered by health professionals - in Yemen this figure is only 22%. Global health inequality offends our humanity and threatens our security. One of the greatest human rights challenges of our time is to create effective health systems for all."

The right to health is enshrined in a number of globally ratified agreements including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 25 declares that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including medical care". Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ratified by 1513 countries, says that states should take steps to progressively realise the highest attainable standard of health.

Ends

Notes to editors

1 Click here to read Right to Health
http://www.bma.org.uk/ap.nsf/Content/Righttohealth?OpenDocument&Login

2 Journalists who wish to attend the Right to Health seminar should contact the BMA press office on 0207 383 6188 for more details. The seminar is taking place at BMA House on Friday 9 December from 10 am until 12pm. Journalists wishing to interview Mary Robinson or Paul Hunt should call Alex Renton on 07957 371902.

3 As of August 2005

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