United Nations

AIR POLLUTION:
CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

24th Meeting of the Health and International Development Group of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the Islamic Republic of Iran

7 January 2015
Tehran, Iran

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The world today is facing serious development challenges resulting from man-made climate change.

For public health – and human security – climate change has become the defining issue of the 21st century.

Climate and weather variables affect:

- the air we breathe,
- the food we eat,
- the water we drink,
- and the chances that we will become infected with a life-threatening infectious disease.

Our planet is losing its capacity to sustain human life in good health.

Last year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued its most alarming report to date. There was a strong focus on the consequences for health.

The most effective adaptation strategies for health are known to involve measures like:

- immunization,
- maternal and child health services,
- and the provision of clean water and adequate sanitation.

These all depend on a well-functioning basic public health infrastructure.

However, air pollution has now emerged as a silent killer with an impact which is four times greater than that of HIV/AIDS. Most people don’t even know about this.

According to recent report by WHO, air pollution was the cause of 7 million premature deaths in 2012. The main culprits were:
• suspended particles – of a diameter less than one-tenth the thickness of a human hair –
• and some noxious gases emitted from vehicular traffic, heating and cooking.

WHO recommends a maximum level of particulate matter of 20 micrograms per cubic metre. Yet major cities such as Cairo, New Delhi and Beijing are, on average, well beyond this limit.

Tehran and some other larger cities of Iran are not doing much better. About half of the world’s urban population, mostly in developing countries, are exposed to air pollution that is over two-and-a-half times the recommended safety levels according to WHO.

Many measures are needed, including providing safe alternatives to indoor cooking and heating in low-income countries.

But vehicle emissions must now become a priority. Vehicle fleets in emerging-economy cities are set to double during the next five to ten years. The global vehicle fleet is set to grow from about 1 billion to 3 billion vehicles by 2050.

The news is not all bad news, however. We possess the technical knowledge, the technology and the management mechanisms to monitor and reduce these emissions rapidly and effectively.

Many countries have already stepped up to this with remarkable results.

The United Nations takes note of the ongoing effort of the Islamic Republic of Iran to contribute to global efforts to mitigate climate change and ensure adaptation to its consequences. We take note of measures taken to combat urban air pollution.
We however believe that a stronger integrated approach is needed if the urban air pollution is to be addressed quickly and effectively and stand ready to join hands in this regard. This must be backed up by strong support at the political level. And it must also be supported by strong public demand and public awareness.

Today, UNDP will be pleased to share with you a presentation on global and local air pollution issues – to be made by Dr. Saeid Ferdowsi – and then we will provide some perspectives on options to shift the taxi fleet of Tehran towards more hybrid cars. This will be done by Dr. Mehdi Kamyab.

Thank you all.