

## UN Summit boosts health goals

The 60th anniversary UN World Summit gave a much-needed boost to efforts to improve health in developing countries, although there was little progress on proposals to increase development aid from rich to poor countries.

The reform document adopted by 151 heads of state and government gathered in New York from 14 to 16 September watered down UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's original proposals, but health experts said it was positive for the health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

"The summit laid down a marker to say 'we've got to take time to build health systems if we want to achieve the MDGs'. It put health systems in the middle of the action," said Dr Andrew Cassels, WHO Director of MDGs, Health and Development Policy.

Almost half of the final 35-page document concerned development

issues. Among other things, the section on health recognizes the importance of investing in adequately resourced and staffed health systems if countries are to achieve the health-related MDGs.

It recommits governments to achieving universal access to reproductive health by 2015 — which is key for MDG 5 to improve maternal health and MDG 4 to improve child health — and encourages support of WHO's Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network. It also reconfirmed support for achieving MDG 6 on HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, including tuberculosis.

World leaders also made a commitment to implement a package for HIV prevention, treatments and care to ensure universal access to treatment by 2010.

"In terms of HIV treatment, we are pleased that we have a timetable, even if countries aren't committed financially," said Max Lawson, policy advisor at Oxfam International.

"For our HIV campaign universal access is a victory."

Lawson said the document was weak in its reference to health-care workers and user fees for health services, which Oxfam believes should be phased out to help combat poverty.

Cassels said there was little progress on proposals to increase aid. The final document encouraged wealthy nations to set timetables for giving 0.7% of their gross national product (GNP) to development aid by 2015.

At the summit, US President George W. Bush announced a new International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza, in which WHO will play a central role.

"Overall the summit was positive for WHO," said Cassels. "It reflected some of our key messages for the MDGs, discussed means, and talk of the global flu pandemic was everywhere." ■

Juhie Bhatia, *New York*

## Recent news from WHO

- WHO Director-General Lee Jong-wook called on UN Member States to build stronger health systems to achieve the **health-related Millennium Development Goals** at a roundtable at the 2005 World Summit in New York from 14 to 16 September.
- The **Global Polio Eradication Initiative**, of which WHO is a member, launched an emergency plan on 13 September to immunize 34 million children in the horn of Africa after a polio case was confirmed in Somalia, a country that has been polio-free since 2002.
- Three public health advocacy groups merged to create the **Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health** on 12 September. The new group, hosted by WHO, campaigns for better child and maternal health particularly in poor countries.
- A total of as many as 4000 people may eventually die as a result of **radiation exposure from the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident** in 1986 in Ukraine, an international team of more than 100 scientists concluded. This and other findings were published on 5 September in a United Nations report entitled: Chernobyl's Legacy: Health, Environmental and Socio-Economic Impacts on Impacts. By mid-2005 fewer than 50 deaths had been directly attributed to radiation from the disaster.
- WHO called on countries to educate people who are taking **antimalarial drugs** about the importance of finishing their medication courses, as incomplete treatment can cause drug resistance. The call came after a WHO report published on 6 September called on countries to closely monitor the effectiveness of antimalarial drugs.
- In the wake of **Hurricane Katrina** which hit the US Gulf Coast in August, the Pan American Health Organization, the WHO regional office for the Americas, said on 1 September its experts were assisting the US Department of Health and Human Services at federal and state levels and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in a number of public health areas. On top of the devastation wrought by the unprecedented US natural disaster, there is growing concern about the health of thousands of survivors. To read more see: <http://www.paho.org/>
- WHO said in August that seven **antiretroviral (ARV) medicines** manufactured by Indian pharmaceuticals company Ranbaxy Laboratories Ltd which had previously been removed from the WHO list of prequalified medicines had been reinstated on that list.
- On 31 August, WHO's Regional Office for Africa called on African governments as well as civil society and nongovernmental organizations operating in the 46-country Region to involve **African traditional medicine** and its practitioners more in **HIV prevention**.
- WHO's Regional Office for Africa declared **tuberculosis an emergency in Africa** on 26 August at a Regional Committee meeting of African health ministers from the 46 Member States in Maputo, Mozambique. The move came in response to an epidemic that has more than quadrupled the annual number of new tuberculosis cases in most African countries since 1990.
- On 24 August, Swiss pharmaceuticals company Roche's donated three million treatments of antiviral drug Tamiflu (oseltamivir) to WHO's stockpile of antiviral drugs to help with an early response to a **future influenza pandemic**.

For more about these and other WHO news items please see: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/2005/en/index.html>