

**MESSAGE TO COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT  
FROM THE COMMONWEALTH HEALTH MINISTERS MEETING  
GENEVA 2007**

Commonwealth Ministers of Health held their annual meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, on the eve of the 59<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> World Health Assemblies. The themes of the meetings were “Human Resources for Health” and “Lifestyle Diseases: Health Systems Approaches”.

The meetings were chaired by Hon. Rosie Winterton, MP, Minister of State for Health, United Kingdom, and Hon. Brigadier General Dr Brian Chituwo, MP, Minister of Health, Zambia, respectively, and were attended by representatives of other partners including regional and civil society organisations, bilateral and multilateral organisations.

Ministers noted that the Commonwealth has 30 per cent of the global population but 60 per cent of global HIV/AIDS cases and maternal deaths, and noted that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is accelerating in many countries despite the fact that antiretroviral treatment has increased from 2 per cent to 28 per cent in the Commonwealth in the last two years. In the Commonwealth, there are 300,000 annual preventable maternal deaths and an estimated 4 million infant deaths. Ministers noted that the WHO estimates a 4.2 million global shortage of trained health workers with critical shortages in 17 Commonwealth countries.

Ministers discussed non-communicable diseases noting that they are a major contributing factor to poverty, ill-health, and slow economic development in many Commonwealth countries. Non-communicable diseases cause 35 million deaths a year and account for 60 per cent of all deaths globally. Eighty per cent of deaths from Heart Disease, Stroke and Diabetes occur in low and middle income countries and are estimated to reduce GDP by 1-5 per cent per annum.

Ministers noted that 50 of the 53 Commonwealth countries have eradicated the wild Polio virus and that a Polio free Commonwealth is within sight.

Ministers recognised that health is a human right and noted progress at both Commonwealth Health Ministers Meetings. They welcomed the work plan being pursued by the Secretariat, approved the actions taken and endorsed the results achieved. They acknowledged that the work plan to achieve the targets defined by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provides the framework for coordinated and integrated action.

More specifically, Ministers supported the need for strengthening the integrated approach and for national action to:

- Promote best practices and ensure adequate resources are allocated to health at the national level, and explore innovative ways of accessing financing for health workforce development;

- Continue to work together to implement the Commonwealth Code of Practice for International Recruitment of Health Workers, including further assessment of the options on compensation set out in the Code of Practice, so as to benefit the poorest and most vulnerable Commonwealth citizens;
- Strengthen national health systems, including meeting agreed commitments on financing and other resources, service delivery and promotion of a healthy lifestyle;
- Develop integrated policies and strategies for reducing chronic diseases, based on reliable evidence, prevention strategies and involving relevant partners and stakeholders, such as the food industry, the media and relevant sports bodies;
- Promote education in schools and elsewhere on health and nutrition and facilitate healthy environments at all levels of society.

**Heads of Government are invited to:**

- Support the leadership role of Health Ministers to ensure the timely achievement of the health related MDGs;
- Meet commitments on funding and investment to improve health policy interventions including, but not limited to: health, education, urban planning and waste and sanitation issues;
- Address the human resources for health crisis by supporting a comprehensive approach which deals with supply, deployment, retention and education;
- Ensure health systems are adequately resourced to deliver an integrated package of services that are responsive to the health needs of the population;
- Maintain momentum and support for a final drive to eradicate Polio, and maintain a high level of focus on HIV/AIDS and maternal and child health;
- Facilitate and support physical activity at all stages of the lifecycle to help combat the rising incidence of non-communicable diseases;
- Consider endorsing cross government mechanisms which address the rising burden of life style diseases including education, trade, diet and food standards, taxation and regulation.