

Conference Alert

International Conference on Realising the Rights to Health and Development for All, Hanoi, Vietnam, October 26-29, 2009.

University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sydney, July 5, 2009: Asia's economic transformation is putting the region's health at risk, a leading academic has warned.

UNSW Professor of Health and Human Rights, Daniel Tarantola, says despite extraordinary progress which has lifted 600 million people out of poverty in Asia since 1990, the basic right to health is under threat and the future looks more uncertain.

"The gap between the rich and poor is growing. The poor are getting sicker in crowded, polluted slums as Asia rapidly urbanizes, while the diseases of affluence like cardiovascular disease, cancer and depression are hitting the new rich," he says.

"The basic human right to health and economic development are inextricably linked, so we have to understand this complex relationship if we are going to turn Asia's growing wealth into better health."

The first international conference to be held in Asia on health, human rights and development will consider the major threats to global and regional public health.

"Realising the rights to health and development for all necessitates bold actions on concurrent crises facing the world. Public health emergencies, economic globalization and climate change figure prominently among them" says Associate Professor Dr Dao Duy Quat, of the Central Commission for Popularization and Education of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

The conference will be co-hosted by UNSW's Initiative on Health and Human Rights and the Central Commission for Popularization and Education of The Communist Party of Vietnam, in Hanoi, 26-29 October, 2009. It will examine access to basic health services, public health challenges and looming health emergencies with a view to creating a comprehensive analysis of how these issues - that have been largely addressed in isolation of one another - actually interplay, and how they can be best addressed through rights-based approaches.

Globally, the health care picture is troubling. Despite extraordinary advances in medical science, the gap between the promises of modern health systems and the world's disease burden is growing.

Asia is especially vulnerable as it has the highest out-of-pocket health care costs and the lowest per cent of GDP government spending on health. "Asia hosts the highest number of households driven into poverty by health care costs, yet also boasts some of the world's best medical services for those who can pay", says Professor Tarantola. "Being poor and poorly educated makes people sick, and being sick often makes people poor. Health and development are inextricably linked."

This is the first conference hosted in the developing world to bring together the three critical areas of study - rights, health and development. "It's a vital step in forging a path forward for global health" says Dr Cao Duc Thai, former Director of the Vietnamese Institute for Human Rights, of the Ho Chi Minh National Political - Administrative Academy.

Professor Tarantola says Vietnam is an ideal location and case study for the conference because it has achieved notable progress in health and in development but is facing many of common health threats linked to rapid industrialization and urbanization.

The conference is co-sponsored by The Atlantic Philanthropies, AusAID (Vietnam), USAID/Health Policy Initiative, OneUN (Vietnam), the Open Society Institute, and the John Hirshman International Health and Populations Studies Fund.

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