



Press Release 15 October 2015

Climate change, conflict, and mass migration: political leaders meeting in Paris in December have one last chance to act

In December 2015, political leaders will meet in Paris to agree action to tackle one of the greatest threats to the future of our planet, climate change. The 21st Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) is perhaps the last chance to achieve a genuine agreement for effective global action. Yet, with only two months to go, there are serious (two grave in one sentence) concerns among the public health community that our leaders are paying far too little attention to the grave threats to health posed by climate change. A failure to act now risks catastrophic harm to human health, through environmental degradation, crop failure and famine, loss of water supplies, forced migration, and even war over scarce resources. While many factors played a part, researchers have demonstrated that drought in Syria and Iraq, with resulting displacement of population, seems very likely to have played a role in the conflicts now afflicting those countries, whose consequences are also apparent in the mass migration of displaced people to Europe.¹ Climate change has also been linked to recent conflict in Mali, another major source of refugees fleeing to Europe.² On the other side of the planet, climatic changes in the South Pacific threaten widespread famine this year.³ While the late 20th century was characterised by wars over access to oil, there is a real risk that 21st century conflicts will be about access to water. These developments are a warning that we cannot afford to ignore. The European Public Health Association (EUPHA), representing 17,000 public health professionals across Europe, expresses its serious concern about the failure by Europe's political leaders to place health high on the agenda of COP21. It calls upon our leaders the deliberations in Paris to:

¹ <http://www.pnas.org/content/112/11/3241.abstract>

² <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/04/climate-change-food-shortages-conflict-mali-150426105617725.html>

³ <https://theconversation.com/as-papua-new-guinea-faces-worsening-drought-a-past-disaster-could-save-lives-46390>

- ensure that the many and complex impacts of climate change on health are fully recognised;
- create global surveillance systems to track not just climate change but also its impact on health, with a particular focus on vulnerable populations that are often excluded from monitoring systems;
- make plans to respond to emerging climate change related threats to health, such as rise of infectious diseases and other climate related conditions
- take early action to mitigate these threats;
- and ensure that the public health community is fully engaged in the development and implementation of the resulting policies.

EUPHA also strongly endorses the call by the French Society for Public Health for the French government to take similar actions

<http://www.wma.net/en/20activities/30publichealth/30healthenvironment/10climate/Projet-communique---EN-version-finale.pdf>