

## **Speech – Opening of the Fourth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment**

15 April 2014, Paris, France

Madame Touraine, Minister of Social Affairs and Health, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues,

I am very pleased to welcome all participants, on behalf of WHO, to this Fourth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment.

I wish to warmly thank the Government of France for hosting us in this beautiful city, and for being an excellent partner and supporter of the work of the WHO, leading the way on many fronts. Let's remember that, in 1999, on the occasion of the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, France, along with Switzerland and Austria, published a landmark study that for the first time estimated the effects of transport-related air pollution on health using a common methodology. Let me also thank France for its political leadership in the European Region within the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board, whose first meeting was hosted here in Paris in May 2011. In 2015, France will host the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change: this testifies to the leading role of France on issues that have major implications for global health and close links to the agenda of this Meeting.

Let me express my pleasure to be here today with my colleagues from the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), our partner in the joint secretariat of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme, which we know as THE PEP.

A warm welcome also to Dr Mihail Kokubowski, from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, who is serving as the Chair of THE PEP, as well as the two co-chairs: Mr Robert Thaler from Austria and Mr Matthias Rinderknecht from Switzerland. Thanks to you and the members of THE PEP steering committee and its bureau for your strategic guidance, commitment and support.

I am delighted to be with you today to mark an important milestone in the history of THE PEP. This Meeting brings us together to learn from our experiences, to be inspired by our successes, and to agree on how we can further strengthen our commitment to work together to fulfil THE PEP vision of “green and healthy mobility and transport for sustainable livelihoods for all”. Later today, the Paris Declaration will be on the table for adoption, and I hope that you will look at it as at a useful blueprint to guide and support action at the international and national levels.

At a time of shrinking resources, when governments closely scrutinize the necessity to make new international commitments or to renew existing ones, questions may be raised as to whether there is indeed value added for Member States to participate in a process like THE PEP, which, since its start in 2002, has been entirely driven on a voluntary basis by your political will. Let me share with you my answer to this question, from the perspective of the WHO, the United Nations agency tasked with protecting and promoting health for all.

Today, in the 53 Member States that make up the WHO European Region, nearly nine out of 10 people die because of cardiovascular or chronic respiratory diseases, cancer, diabetes and mental disorders. We know that these outcomes depend to a very large extent on decisions that take place outside the health sector, and that transport and urban policies play a major role in shaping health, for better or worse.

Think of the loss of 90 000 lives per year due to road traffic injuries. Consider that up to 1.6 million healthy life-years are lost every year due to transport noise in European cities, or that the most recent WHO calculations of the burden of disease, which were published not later than three weeks ago, estimate that nearly 500 000 deaths were attributable to ambient air pollution in the European Region in 2012. This new evidence shows that risks from air pollution are now far greater than previously thought or understood, particularly for heart disease and stroke. This calls for concerted action to clean up the air we all breathe, including through better transport policies.

But then think also of the tremendous positive effects that green and healthy transport may have by providing safe roads; reducing emissions of air pollution, greenhouse gases and noise; creating conditions that support cycling and walking; facilitating interaction; reducing inequalities in access to jobs, services, education and amenities; and creating thriving communities where it is desirable to live, work and raise children. In both cases, for the bad and for the good, transport and urban planning policies are in the driving seat.

WHO's new European health policy, Health 2020, acknowledges the role of sectoral policies as determinants of health, and advocates "whole of government" and "whole of society" approaches as means to develop a shared agenda across sectors of government. THE PEP is a vivid example of Health2020 in action. Through its unique governance platform, THE PEP enables intersectoral policy-making and helps bring health consideration within the horizon of transport and urban planners. In addition, by focusing on the urban environment, where more than 80% of Europeans are expected to live by 2020, THE PEP can play an important role in addressing the challenges posed by growing socioeconomic inequalities. It can do so by promoting policies that support access for vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly, people with reduced mobility, as well as by reducing the disproportionate exposures to air pollution and noise in areas that are economically deprived. So, by participating in THE PEP, you are in fact implementing Health 2020.

Through the Parma Declaration on Environment and Health, which you adopted at the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, you are committed to "addressing obesity and injuries through safe environments, physical activity and healthy diet", and have identified THE PEP as a means to attain this goal. So, by participating in THE PEP, you are in fact implementing your commitments under the European environment and health process. And please allow me to remind you, with a hint of pride, that in fact THE PEP is one of the most concrete and lasting results of this process: at the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in 1999, when the Charter on Transport, Environment and Health was adopted, the health dimension was added to a process involving the three sectors, which eventually merged with the UNECE programme of joint action on transport and the environment to give birth to THE PEP.

The account of the journey of THE PEP from the Third to the Fourth High-level Meeting, which is presented in one of the publications that will be launched today, speaks for itself of the range of actions that you have developed at the national level, of the exchanges that you have made of knowledge, challenges and solutions, and of the new tools and ideas that have been spearheaded through THE PEP partnerships. I trust that you will be encouraged by your successes and inspired to further action, through the implementation of the Paris Declaration.

Let me conclude then by unveiling my answer to whether it still makes sense to have THE PEP: the answer is a big yes! I look forward to continuing to work with all our Member States and our UNECE colleagues in serving you in the pursuit of THE PEP objectives, for health and well-being in countries.

Thanks for your attention.