

WFPHA REPORT

Newsletter of the World Federation of Public Health Associations

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WFPHA 10th International Congress on Public Health Leadership Workshops, Global Action Sessions, and Kickbusch Lecture

The World Federation of Public Health Associations held its 10th International Congress on Public Health in Brighton, England from 19-22 April 2004. A series of Leadership Workshops (LWs) and Global Action Sessions (GAS) served as the centerpiece for the WFPHA Congress this time, attracting over 1300 participants. The workshops offered a forum for participants to discuss and debate key issues related to leadership in global public health. The WFPHA leadership has been aware for some time, along with other public health colleagues, that a crisis exists in the public health field at the global level and that part of that crisis is a failure to provide leadership on the part of public health leaders and professionals. The causes for this state of affairs are not universally agreed upon, nor is there consensus about how to proceed. Yet WFPHA realized these challenges warrant further exploration and discussion at the Congress to see if viable approaches or even solutions might be identified.

The Global Action Sessions focused on global public health issue areas such as global tobacco control and the HIV/AIDS pandemic – emergent project areas in which WFPHA has been active in recent years. These sessions were organized to showcase issues of WFPHA interest and involvement, to take stock of current efforts to address the issues, and to identify next steps for WFPHA leadership and participation in efforts to resolve these issues.

The Leadership Workshops assessed fundamental challenges facing the global public health community within the context of a rapidly changing international order.

As Ilona Kickbusch said in her Hugh Leavell Lecture, “We are at a turning point for public health...the changes our societies

are facing are as significant as the ones encountered in the “golden era” of public health 150 years ago and they are truly global in nature. In consequence, we need a new conceptual map for public health action that incorporates scientific and technological develop-



ment, political, social and economic action, as well as domestic and global public health responsibilities in new ways.”¹

One of these Leadership Workshops, “**Public Health: Its Role in Conflict Resolution, Peace, and Human Rights**”, addressed one issue in public health that has emerged in the past few decades- the role of public health professionals in conflict and crisis. As the WFPHA Declaration on Public Health, Peace and Human Rights (2003) signals, “Public health has important social roles for the advancement of practical techniques for disease and injury prevention, as an early detection and warning system for sudden or gradual changes in vulnerability; for the protection of women, children and other vulnerable groups; in fighting the scourges of bio-terrorism, substance abuse and drug trafficking; in addressing the problems of refugees, any kind of torture, prisoners of war and starvation; in combating hate organizations and their ideologies, as well as all forms of humiliation, abuse, and the trafficking in human beings.”

Presenters and participants at the workshop tackled such questions as: In situations of crisis and war, what is the reaction of public health professionals faced with new challenges for which they are unprepared? How can their experience be integrated into the public health framework? What role should public health take in conflict prevention and resolution? The discussion resulted in several declarations, conclusions and recommendations, including the following:

- **Public Health is a Human Rights Issue:** Presenters emphasized the need for a rights-based approach to public health, to recognize the assurance of healthcare as a fundamental human right. They agreed that there is a shortcoming in the Geneva Convention, which was developed for classical war situations, and recommended that the Convention be amended to include the guarantee of public health, especially in “irregular” modern wars.



WFPHA Member Representatives gather for WFPHA's 38th Annual Meeting held at the 10th International Congress on Public Health in Brighton, UK.

- **Prevention over Protection:** The workshop advocated a preventative cause-oriented strategy to combatting political violence over the current emphasis on protection.
- **Professional Autonomy:** Conflict situations present a real test for maintaining the professional autonomy of public health professions. To ensure professional autonomy, public health associations, including WFPHA, should formulate a code for public health professionals including reference to minimum health care irrespective of combat status.
- **Security:** In modern wars it has been estimated that up to 90 percent of all casualties are civilians. The Geneva Convention currently only protects against attacks on hospitals, but the workshop participants agreed that public health professionals must be given a maximum of security as well, and therefore the Geneva Convention should be amended to include all types of sanctuaries and shelters.
- **Education and Training:** Training of public health professionals for emergency situations was agreed to be of vital importance and should be included as one of the basic modules in public health education. Health professionals, from international organizations acting in the conflict zone or any emergency situation, must be well equipped with knowledge and skills to cope with problems, in circumstances far worse than in their country of origin.
- **Global Approach to Building Public Health Infrastructure:** Public health professionals and their organizations need to collaborate and cooperate beyond the conflict lines and share their knowledge, resources and capacities to insure proper treatment for all parties.

In the coming months, WFPHA plans to publish reports on its website of the Leadership Workshops and Global Action Sessions, including recommendations for future WFPHA actions. If funds permit, WFPHA will publish an informational booklet on the Congress' Leadership Workshops and Global Action Sessions 🌐

¹ The full transcript of Ilona Kickbusch's lecture, “The End of Public Health As We Know It: Constructing Public Health in the 21st Century” is available at www.wfpaha.org