

UN's Efforts on NCDs Historic, but Flawed

Compulsory targets of NCD reductions were cut from the document just days before the meeting.

BY MIRIAM E. TUCKER

FROM THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

NEW YORK – For the first time ever, the United Nations formally recognized and set an agenda to reduce the burden of noncommunicable diseases globally. However, to many observers anticipating the historic event, the effort fell short of setting tangible targets for driving change.

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In the UN declaration, member states agreed to reduce salt and sugars and eliminate trans fats in foods, and to increase access to health care systems.

ship between industry and [the UN], but between academic bodies, foundations, and other entities. They all bring their own particular backgrounds, interests, prejudices and perspectives. All forms of conflicts need to be addressed.”

Dr. Yach, formerly a professor of public health and head of the division of global health at Yale University in New Haven, Conn., and a former executive director of the WHO, said he disagrees that industry should be barred from policy development. “I think that industry has to be involved in the development of the options for policy, and in the implementation.

“The middle bit – when final decisions are made on policy – is probably best left in the hand of government and the United Nations,” he said. “But if industry is not at the table, even talking about the options, the UN and the government will simply be lost in terms of knowing the full range of possibilities that are out there.”

He noted that industry is already committed to reformulating products, to changing food and beverage marketing to children, and to promoting greater physical activity.

In 2012, the UN is slated to address the issues of targets and indicators, as well as establish a postsummit partnership to drive implementation and ensure accountability.

There is still a chance that the “25% by 2025” NCD mortality reduction goal and other targets might be reinserted, NCD Alliance CEO Ann Keeling said in an interview.

The NCD Alliance, the main lobbying group that had first initiated the call for the UN high-level meeting, will be urging governments and the UN system to agree to strong outcomes on those issues.

“If the outcomes are strong, we will forgive governments for not agreeing to those at the summit,” Ms. Keeling concluded. ■

Focus on U.S. Agenda

The 2-day, high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly was not aimed just at the developing world, although that was a major focus.

Indeed, heads of state from more than 130 member states – including low-, middle- and high-income nations – were each allotted 3 minutes to speak about their own countries’ experiences with NCDs and their national efforts taken to combat them.

The United States, where NCDs account for 7 of 10 deaths, is committed to reducing NCDs, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said in her 3-minute address.

“For the United States’ part, under President Obama, the United States

has made taking on chronic disease a major focus.”

Among the U.S. initiatives are the recently launched Million Hearts campaign (<http://millionhearts.hhs.gov>), a public-private sector initiative that aims to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes in 5 years by improving aspirin use, blood pressure management, cholesterol control, and smoking prevention. She also pointed to First Lady Michelle Obama’s ongoing efforts in reducing childhood obesity, and the Clinton Global Initiative Commitment, a public-private partnership aimed at supporting tobacco cessation efforts using mobile phone technologies.