



## ECOSOC MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE

Working Well!

Safe-guarding Adolescents and Youth Livelihood  
in the Face of NCDs and their Risk Factors

July 6, 2012

H.E. Mr. Henry Leonard Mac-Donald

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Suriname to the United Nations (Chair)

Dr Arturo Cervantes Trejo

Director General for the Promotion of Health, Ministry of Health, Mexico (Co-Chair)

### SUMMARY REPORT

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A Ministerial Breakfast Roundtable on "Working Well! Safe-guarding Adolescents and Youth Livelihood in the Face of NCDs and their Risk Factors" was held on 6 July 2012 at UN Headquarters, New York City. More than 40 representatives from ECOSOC member countries, other delegations, civil societies, private sector, UN system and other international organisations participated in the event. The list of participants is annexed. The Roundtable was co-hosted by UNICEF and PAHO, in collaboration with NCD Child. It was chaired by H.E. Mr. Henry Leonard Mac-Donald, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Suriname to the United Nations and co-chaired by Dr Arturo Cervantes Trejo, Director General for the Promotion of Health, Ministry of Health of Mexico. The Roundtable drew on the outcomes of the September 2011 High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, and high-lighted the impact of NCDs on the ability of young people to enter the work force on time and to participate fully in productive employment. Policy proposals as well as calls for cooperation between the private, public and civil society sectors were made and emphasized throughout the event.

Non-communicable diseases, principally cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers and chronic respiratory diseases, have reached epidemic proportions globally, bringing hardship to rich and poor nations alike. Of the 57 million global deaths in 2008, 36 million (63%) were due to NCDs. Nearly 80% of NCD deaths occur in low and middle-income countries. In addition, participants noted, mental health and injuries are also of concern and are often included in this category of diseases. Most NCDs are strongly associated with four particular behaviours, viz. tobacco use, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet and the harmful use of alcohol, all of which are preventable. These risk factors start in many cases in childhood or adolescence, and are difficult to modify in adulthood. Thus, healthy behaviour must be promoted in childhood and adolescence, alongside health-promoting schools, work-places and communities. Participants noted that 43% of the global population is less than 35 years of age, and these young people, long left out of the NCD conversation, must now be active in the fight against NCDs.

In addition to protecting the health and well-being of the global population, participants emphasized the burden of NCDs on individual, family and national economic health. The economic burden of NCDs is seen in sky-rocketing health care costs, much of which is being spent on treatment rather

than prevention, but also in reduced productivity at work due to illness and absence. Participants noted that adults and children living with an NCD, or caring for a relative with an NCD, cannot participate in educational or employment activities.

H.E. Amb. MacDonald underscored the need for the international community to commit to raising level of funding for NCDs, as well as ensuring that there is adequate coordination and multi-sectoral action. In the keynote remarks, Sir George Alleyne, Director Emeritus of PAHO, called for partnership and cooperation amongst all sectors of society. He challenged ECOSOC members to take multi-sectoral action at the government level, to implement proven policy solutions to scale up at a national level and to appeal to Ministers of Finance to ensure that serious investments are made in the prevention and control of NCDs. Participants agreed that NCDs need to be seen as an economic, social and political problem, not just a health problem. Tackling NCDs will require cooperation between many different technical areas including education, health, and research, as well as with the private sector to promote positive advertising and media influence on youth. Sir Alleyne called upon civil society leaders to put a face to NCDs, to promote the cause and to ensure that prevention and control of NCDs stays a top priority on the international agenda.

Dr Nicholas Alipui, Director of Programmes of UNICEF emphasised the need to balance treatment and care with prevention through promoting healthy life-styles, and committed to UNICEF preparing, in collaboration with partners, a new edition of *Facts for Life* on NCDs to promote health literacy. Dr Jon Andrus, Deputy Director of PAHO cited evidence of the 'best buys' that can inform policies and programmes of member states to effect positive change. Dr Kate Armstrong of NCD Child put the face of children and families coping with NCDs at the centre of the discussion, and highlighted the role that civil society can play in addressing NCDs. Dr. Arturo Cervantes Trejo drew on the experiences and lessons learned from the UN's Decade of Action for Road Safety as a roadmap for mobilizing cooperation and partnership between the public and private sectors. Additionally, Dr. Trejo ended the Roundtable on a positive note, recognizing the incredible progress that has been made in global public health since the formation of the United Nations in 1948 and the Declaration of Human Rights. He and other speakers acknowledged the important role that the UN system plays in the promotion of health as a human right and the need to keep the UN institutions at the forefront of this global challenge to prevent and control NCDs.

In summary, participants recognised the need for increased attention at all levels – international, national and local, and concerted action to address the epidemic of NCDs. Participants agreed that action must be taken to put NCDs as a priority on national and international agendas, and a lifecourse approach must be used in order to tackle the NCD epidemic. Participants reaffirmed the need to promote healthy lifestyles, particularly among children and adolescents, through multi-sectoral interventions. Participants emphasised the need to address the significant financial burden that NCDs have on families and national economies, linked to the inability of young people and parents to find employment and/or to work to full capacity while meeting considerable treatment costs. Participants concluded that there was a need for greater attention to and investment in prevention, particularly education. And finally, participants committed to supporting greater collaboration among member states, and between government and the non-government sector, particularly the private sector, youth groups and civil society organisations.