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A European Council on Global Health

Recognition of the need for policy coherence and strategic direction of global health is only just beginning to emerge in Europe, both within countries and at the European Union (EU) level. As part of its new policies in health and development, the EU has declared its goal to increase the synergy between policy domains, a move that provides a new base for global-health action. Additionally, the new Health Strategy of the European Commission¹ introduces “Strengthening the EU’s voice in global health” as one of the four basic principles of its approach. The 2005 communication² includes a series of proposals to enhance funding for development work (including health goals). The specific aid targets to be reached by 2010 were accepted by the European Council on May 24, 2005, and are now part of its official policy. Recently, the European Commission proposed several actions to encourage member states to increase the amount and effectiveness of aid, as well as areas in which policies could improve coordination.³

The European Foundation Centre set up the European Partnership on Global Health in 2005, which is a group of organisations committed to a more systematic European approach to global health. A meeting, co-convened by the Partnership and the Global Forum for Health Research in 2005, brought together many organisations to review the priorities of global-health challenges and potential topics for action. To provide a reliable basis for discussion, the Partnership subsequently published a key recommendation to strengthen the European voice in global health.⁴

To explore this recommendation further, the European Foundation Centre, the Global Forum on Health Research, and the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies convened a meeting with 25 organisations, including WHO and the European Commission, in Geneva on Jan 28–29, 2008. The participants at this meeting agreed that Europe should exercise stronger leadership in global health, as it had done for environment, and mobilise the diversity of European members to contribute to global-health goals. They agreed to start a European Council on Global Health, which would work to influence policy and



International Conference Centre, Geneva, location of the Geneva Health Forum in May, 2008

improve practice through advocacy-based evidence and analysis, to be set up in 2009.

This platform of the many global-health participants in Europe would promote: European health values (eg, universality, access to good-quality care, equity, and solidarity) in the international arena and good governance; coherence of broad policy making and synergy of policies for health benefits (eg, as development, trade, environment, and agriculture), especially for the social and economic determinants of health; and European commitment to global-health equity, with a focus on the health of the poorest populations.

The meeting welcomed the possibility that such a European Council on Global Health could become part of a larger alliance of similar councils from other regions of the world. The participants proposed that, during the constitution of such a council, dialogue with colleagues from the developing world would be ensured, along with continued dialogue with the Global Health Council, USA, and the Canadian Society for International Health (both of whom were at the meeting). Those at the meeting further suggested making use of European presidencies and that the initiative should aim to include global health in the agenda of the next EU presidencies. This suggestion implies a structured dialogue with the European Commission on global-health matters via the European Health Strategy and building relations with WHO, in particular its Brussels office. There is also a need to keep abreast of the development of a European foreign policy and, in line with the Oslo Ministerial Declaration on Health in Foreign Policy,⁵ to ensure that health is considered as part of this agenda.

The meeting also proposed that a taskforce be created to extend the proposals for the goals and objectives,

governance, structure, membership, beneficiaries, partnerships, location, financing, and performance measures of a European Council on Global Health. This taskforce will meet in May, 2008 in Geneva on the occasion of the Geneva Health Forum. Revising and updating the European Foundation Centre's global-health policy glossary⁴ could be a useful method of communication for the initiative. The initiative will set up a small secretariat to support the members and taskforce. The initial organisers were made responsible for pressing the initiative forward, along with fundraising. A strong plea was made to European institutions to continue their support on matters of global health, and assist as well as engage in the initiative.

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We are the initial organisers and members of the taskforce of the European Council on Global Health.

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Registers needed for new interventional procedures

Recent policy initiatives that aim to reinvigorate clinical audit in the UK offer an opportunity to support good registers for the safe introduction of new interventions.¹ Unlike new drugs, which require a substantial amount of research and assessment before licensing, new procedures have often found their way into clinical practice with little and imperfect evidence. This situation is being addressed very gradually and variably in different

countries by the use of health-technology-assessment systems. Prominent among these is the Interventional Procedures Programme of the UK's National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), which has published guidance about the efficacy and safety of over 250 procedures since 2002. This guidance applies to the UK and is also used as a source of information in other countries.²