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## *Director's Letter*

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### THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

In the industrial era, the power of the human species to transform nature has led to a utilitarian view of the world: natural resources have been seen as instruments of development and little thought has been given to the repercussions of wastefulness and pollution. Perhaps unconsciously, we have believed that science and technology would eventually provide solutions to these problems, and so we have been slow to confront them. Now we realize that man's old relationship with nature must change. We live in a world of finite and rapidly shrinking resources. This realization presents us with a double challenge: to reshape our concept of development and to not let development goals fall prey to the environmental crisis.

The health of the population is intimately linked to development as both a requisite and a beneficiary. In addition, all environmental deterioration has health consequences. Thus, it is vital that the health sector take part in initiatives to change the way we treat our world, and that it begin to analyze the impact of policy from an environmental point of view. We recognize that governments struggling with a scarcity of funds and the immediate emergencies of disease and other suffering may view the enormous environmental problems looming in the future as overwhelming. Nevertheless, the longer-term problems are too important to ignore.

It is the Organization's responsibility to promote an awareness of the links between the health of the environment and the health of humanity, and to identify answers within the constraints imposed by our own resource limitations and institutional nature. Environmental health should be a priority concern that is not restricted to one program but is integrated into the activities of all the technical programs. We are not alone in this effort. Many multilateral and bilateral nongovernmental agencies, as well as governments, are involved in finding solutions, and we all must cooperate and take responsibility in our areas of expertise. A unified response is required to a crisis that truly unites our planet, in the sense that environmental problems respect no national or regional boundaries. We must learn to think in global terms, but solutions to our common problems must begin with action at the local level, for the seeds of change sown in one place will produce a harvest that is reaped worldwide.



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