



PRESS STATEMENT

AHED's Fifth General Conference

PEOPLE'S HEALTH: DETERMINANTS, CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



On the 14th and 15th of May, the "Association for Health and Environmental Development (AHED)" convened its fifth general conference, in collaboration with the "People's Health Movement (PHM)".

Entitled "People's Health: Determinants, Current Challenges and Opportunities", the conference aimed at identifying the current challenges facing people's health, the determinants of ill health as well as identifying alternative strategies for achieving better health for all.

Over the two days, more than one hundred participants representing civil society organizations (from Egypt, and from Palestine, Iraq and Morocco), Universities, the Egyptian Ministry of Health and Population, the WHO East Mediterranean Representative Office, as well as international representatives of the People's Health Movement discussed numerous issues under four main themes. These were a) the features and causes of the current health situation/health crisis; b) the impact of neo-liberal policies and militarization on human health c) the impact of liberalization of global trade and the international agreements on human health; and d) approaches and strategies for health care provision. Apart from presentations and discussions tackling issues at the national (Egyptian), regional and global levels in plenary sessions, testimonies were provided by several civil society groups involved in a variety of health-related local experiences and/or initiatives from across Egypt.

19% of the Egyptian children under 5 years suffer from chronic malnutrition. EDHS, 2000

In the final declaration, conference participants affirmed that:

- "Health for All" is possible. The resources required are available if the political will exists.
- Health is an outcome of the interaction between social, economic and political determinants. It is primarily a social, economic and political issue.
- Health care systems, likewise are an outcome of the interaction between their historical development on the one hand and the dominant socio-economic policies prevailing in each era on the other hand.
- The present neo-liberal policies propagated by the multinational corporations - whose influence is currently dominating in the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization - are negatively impacting on people's health all over the world. They are also increasing the equity gap between different countries and within each country.

The poorer 10% of the Egyptian population gain 3.7% of the national income whereas 29.5% for the richer 10%.

'Thus the process of development begins by widening the gap between rich and poor in each country ... 'Globalisation and World Order' Lecture at Trinity College, Dublin, October 12, 1999.



Among the most important determinants, participants identified in our region are the following:

- Occupation, as in Palestine and Iraq, and armed conflicts, as in Sudan and in other countries within our region.
- Policies of “structural adjustment” and privatization, and international agreements such as the free trade and the intellectual property rights agreements, are leading to the rise of negative social determinants of people’s health. Among the most prominent of these are unemployment, commoditization of resources and basic services, such as, health and educational services and drinking water and sanitation, which are increasingly becoming in-accessible to the majority of people, particularly the poor and marginalized. These policies are also leading to the deterioration of the general conditions of public health, including occupational health and safety conditions.
- In Egypt, participants expressed concerns regarding the potential negative impact of the “Health Sector Reform” on people’s health. These focus particularly on existing trends towards the privatization of the Health Insurance Organization.
- Finally, the participants stressed that the essential requirement for achieving health for all are policies that focus on human development, the availability of basic services for all, raising the social standards of people, and combating increasing poverty and inequity.
- In addition, the conference participants declared their solidarity with the asbestos factory workers whose case was considered as a flagrant example of the negative impact of the dominant market economy, the decline in the monitoring and enforcement role of the state on business, and neglect of workers’ health and safety rights.

3,864 Palestinians were killed in the period from Sept 29th 2000 – April 29th, 2005

“The majority of studies in Africa, whether theoretical or empirical, are negative regarding structural adjustment and its effects on health outcomes”

Breman & Shelton, WHO CMH WG6, 2001

A comprehensive ‘democratic’ non-governmental Health Insurance System in Egypt is an implementable option. Studies have estimated the average cost per capita per year to be L.E. 150, with a total national cost of only L.E. 10.5 billion.

Prof. Abdel Monem Ebeid

"That any sane nation, having observed that you could provide for the supply of bread by giving bakers a pecuniary interest in baking for you, should go on to give a surgeon a pecuniary interest in cutting off your leg, is enough to make one despair of political humanity".

Bernard Shaw (The Doctors’ Dilemma)



Three very important global initiatives were also introduced in the conference:

1. The WHO-assigned Commission on Social Determinants of Health. Dr. Hoda Rashad, the Director of the Social Research Centre of the American University of Cairo, and one of 17 international members of the newly-created body, described the rationale and objectives of the commission whose work will cover the period of the next three years. The core of the Commission's work will be to identify, evaluate and adapt and distribute effective strategies to address social determinants, with the aim of supporting governments to scale up interventions. The Commission will be seeking to engage civil society organizations in its different activities.
2. The Global Health Watch (GHW) initiative. Prof. David Sanders (South Africa), a member of the PHM Global Steering Group, described the rationale and objectives of the initiative, as well as the contents of the report prepared. The GHW initiative aims to present an alternative world health report developed by civil society groups across the world, a report whose production is being led by the PHM. Dr. Sanders announced that the GHW will be simultaneously launched on the 20th of July in different parts of the world, and called for the involvement of conference participants both in the launching of this report and production of future ones. He also encourage the initiation of national and regional health watches.
3. The Second People's Health Assembly (PHA2). Maria Hamlin-Zuniga (Nicaragua), a member of the PHM Global Steering Group, announced that the assembly will take place over the period from the 17th –23rd of July 2005 in Cuenca, Ecuador. She called upon participants to join the PHM, a growing global movement working to combat the health crisis across the world by taking action at all levels – individual, community, national, regional, and global - and in all sectors. She also encourage them to participate in the PHA2 by attending the Ecuador event, and/or by sending testimonies, case studies, audio-visuals materials, or other materials.



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