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A low carbon economy should be good for health and the climate, say leading scientists

Statement to be released at climate change talks in Mexico later this month

Certain actions to cut greenhouse gas emissions and thus reduce climate change can also directly improve human health, according to a statement from the Inter-Academy Medical Panel (IAMP), a global network of the world's medical academies. These health benefits could partly offset the costs of tackling climate change and challenge the belief that policies to tackle climate change will invariably be socially and economically demanding. A copy of the full statement can be found at: www.tinyurl.com/iampHBCCM. IAMP urges global political leaders around the world to take account of the health benefits of such mitigation strategies ahead of their meeting next week in Cancun, Mexico.

While the effects of strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on climate change take time to become manifest and are often widely dispersed across the world, the health benefits can be realised more directly and quickly. The statement identifies several examples from published research of how actions to reduce emissions can also lead to localised improvements in health. These include:-

- The introduction of 150 million low-emission cookstoves in India could prevent around 2 million premature deaths caused by exposure to household pollutants and reduce greenhouse pollutants;
- Reducing the use of private cars in cities and encouraging active travel such as cycling and walking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and lower the burden of chronic disease.

Professor Looi Lai Meng, Akademi Sains Malaysia and Co-Chair of IAMP said, "Many view climate change mainly as a threat to sustainability of the environment and are less conscious of the health issues involved. Furthermore, those in the poorer countries, who are least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, are the most vulnerable and suffer the greatest health threats. The health benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions provide an incentive to cut emissions."

Professor Detlev Ganten, Germany, member of the IAMP Executive Committee and chair of the working group that prepared the statement said, "The endorsement of this statement by Academies from so many different countries makes an important contribution to the global discussion about how best to tackle climate change. A strong case can be made that the public health benefits of cutting greenhouse gas emissions need to be more prominent in international negotiations and domestic policymaking."

"WHO has long argued that embracing 'health-enhancing' low-carbon strategies can allow policy-makers to demonstrate positive health and wealth generating results within a period of years – while averting devastating long-term impacts to the planet" said Maria Neira, WHO Director for Public Health and Environment. "I welcome the IAMP statement which shows the engagement of the health community on this critical issue."

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About the IAMP

The Inter Academy Medical Panel (IAMP) is a global network of national academies of medicine and academies of sciences or engineering with medical members committed to working together to improve health world-wide, especially in low-income countries. IAMP activities focus on institutional collaboration to strengthen the role of all academies in alleviating the health burdens of the world's poorest people; build national scientific capacity in research and higher education to improve health; and provide independent scientific advice on health and science policy to national governments and global organizations.

Member Academies that have endorsed this IAMP Statement as of 25 November 2010, any additional signatories can be viewed at www.tinyurl.com/iampHBCCM

1. Academia Nacional de Medicina de Buenos Aires
2. Academy of Medical Sciences of Armenia
3. Austrian Academy of Sciences
4. Bangladesh Academy of Sciences
5. Academia Boliviana de Medicina
6. Brazilian Academy of Sciences
7. Chinese Academy of Engineering
8. Academia Nacional de Medicina de Colombia
9. Croatian Academy of Medical Sciences
10. Academy of Scientific Research and Technology, Egypt
11. The Delegation of the Finnish Academies of Science and Letters
12. French Academy of Sciences
13. Union of German Academies of Sciences and Humanities
14. Deutsche Akademie der Naturforscher Leopoldina
15. Academia de Ciencias Medicas, Fisicas y Naturales de Guatemala
16. Hungarian Academy of Sciences
17. Indonesian Academy of Sciences
18. Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei
19. The Academy of Sciences for The Developing World
20. Islamic World Academy of Sciences
21. African Academy of Sciences
22. Kenya National Academy of Sciences

23. The National Academy of Sciences, Rep. of Korea
24. Academy of Sciences Malaysia
25. National Academy of Medicine of Mexico
26. Nigerian Academy of Science
27. National Academy of Science and Technology, Philippines
28. Polish Academy of Sciences
29. The Caribbean Academy of Sciences
30. Russian Academy of Medical Sciences
31. Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts
32. Academy of Science of South Africa
33. National Academy of Sciences of Sri Lanka
34. Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences
35. The Tanzania Academy of Sciences
36. Thai Academy of Science and Technology
37. Turkish Academy of Sciences
38. Uganda National Academy Sciences
39. Academy of Medical Sciences, UK
40. Institute of Medicine, US NAS
41. Science Council of Japan