

# ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTES LAUNCHED

*Press Release*

Directors of national public health institutes from different parts of the world met on 29.1.-1.2.2006 in Rio de Janeiro. Following two previous meetings in 2002 and 2004, the International Association of National Public Health Institutes (IANPHI) was finally launched.

The Association is primarily concerned with improvement of public health capacity through service, research and training, in order to improve the health of the populations and reduce health disparities. The aim of the Association is to help the institutes, as they pursue their public health tasks. The Association also helps countries to set up or strengthen their national public health institutes, as desired. Through this the Association aims at making useful contributions to global public health efforts and looks for good partnership with other actors such as WHO, World Bank or major foundations.

The meeting, hosted by the Brazilian public health institute Fiocruz, adopted the constitution and next years work plan of the Association. It also elected the officers and the Executive Board. Dr. Jeffrey Koplan, the former director of CDC, was

elected as President. Dr. Pekka Puska, director of the Finnish institute KTL, hosting the office of the Association, will serve as Vice-President and the other six members of the Board are directors of the national institutes of Brazil, China, Czech Republic, Morocco, Nigeria and Thailand. Dr. Pekka Jousilahti will serve as Secretary General and head the office of the Association in Finland.

The meeting in Rio discussed particularly the role of the institutes in relation to three big challenges: the avian influenza and the pandemic threat, disaster preparedness and prevention of chronic diseases. The comprehensive work carried out by Fiocruz in Brazil was reviewed and commended.

The Association has received financial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Dr. David Fleming, director for global health strategies of the Foundation, emphasized the potential for global health strategies of this collaboration to strengthen public health work, especially in the low income countries. Building institutional capacity and public health infrastructure is a major challenge in numerous countries.