

WELCOME ADDRESS

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me cordially welcome you on behalf of Czech WHO office at the International Conference and Meeting of the Central and Eastern European Chapter. It is honour and pleasure for us that this international meeting is taking place in the Czech Republic. Scientists from the field of environmental epidemiology have an opportunity to meet and discuss during 4 days the actual topics targeted on a healthy and safe physical environment. We are all well aware of fact, that striving for a healthy and safe environment is a continuous, never-ending process as the progress of civilization not only brings solutions to many known dangers but creates new health risks as well. Apart from that, demands on quality of life are constantly increasing.

The physical environment should be regarded as a source for improving living conditions and increasing wellbeing. Although the impact of the physical environment on health has been known for some time, public awareness of environmental hazards has been increasing in recent years. This is the result partly of new scientific evidence demonstrating the link between the physical environment and health.

Scientific evidence has played an important role also in heightening people's awareness of the impact of socio-economic determinants on health, both directly through their influence on health behaviours and neuro-endocrine pathways. Some researchers attribute more than half of all illnesses to these underlying determinants. There is now substantial evidence to show that poorer socio-economic groups are more likely to be exposed to health risks. Social determinants aspects become one of the most important priorities of WHO policy.

Resulting from the 1994 Helsinki Declaration, the Environmental Health Action Plan for Europe and national and local action plans provide the Region with a solid and comprehensive technical basis for action. Each European Member State developed or have developed NEHAPs, each country has its own set of priority actions. WHO and its partners work with the countries to stimulate developments, advise on methodologies and support implementation of the national action plans. An important part of this cooperation is the sharing of countries experiences. Not only for this reason is organization of such a meeting more than welcome.

I would like to express, that WHO Country Office in Prague is ready for cooperation and for ensuring the adequate support from the side of Regional European Office in Copenhagen as well as from HQ in Geneva.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish the Conference to be fruitful for all its participants and – in spite of your hard work at the meeting – I hope you will find time to enjoy the charming environment of Čeladná.