Health professionals call for Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty to protect lives of current and future generations

The international scientific consensus is clear: to protect the health and lives of present and future generations we need a rapid, equitable phase-out of fossil fuels globally, so as not to exceed 1.5ºC of warming. We, the undersigned health professionals and organizations, call on governments around the world to develop and implement a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, laying out a legally binding global plan to:

1. **End expansion of any new fossil fuel infrastructure and production** by immediately ending activity and investment across all new or expanded fossil fuel exploration, extraction, and building of infrastructure, in line with the best available science.

2. **Phase out existing production and use of fossil fuels in a fair and equitable manner** in line with the 1.5C global climate goal. To address existing inequity, we call on high-income countries to provide financial, technological and other support to low- and middle-income countries in the move away from fossil fuels, ensuring the transition reduces poverty rather than exacerbating it.

3. **Fast-track real solutions and ensure a just transition** for every worker, community, and country creating a healthy and sustainable future for all.   A just transition must respect Indigenous rights and the rights of local communities.

Like the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the proposed Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty would be an evidence-based international agreement to control a category of substances well-known to be harmful to human health. The health risks associated with fossil fuels are numerous.

Burning fossil fuels presents severe threats to human and planetary health.

- **Air pollution**, most significantly from burning fossil fuels, is causing more than seven million premature deaths each year. It contributes to cardiovascular disease, respiratory conditions, and cancers. Wildfires, made increasingly intense and common by climate change, add to this burden.

- **The climate crisis**, largely caused by burning fossil fuels, is a critical health threat, exacerbating other health challenges and threatening health care systems.

- The warming climate creates ideal conditions for the transmission of **food and water-borne diseases and spread of vector-borne diseases**, undermining decades of progress in global public health.

- Climate change increases the risk of **heat related illness and death**, especially for very young children, outdoor workers, athletes, and older adults.

- **Droughts, floods, extreme weather events and sea level rise** caused by climate change disrupt livelihoods, pollute water, jeopardize food security, damage infrastructure and force migration

especially for populations living on small islands, coastal regions and low-lying areas.

- Extreme weather events **disrupt global medical supply chains and devastate healthcare facilities**, severely impacting health workers' ability to provide health care.

- Climate change is taking a serious toll on **mental health**, exacerbating anxiety and depression, especially in young people.

There are also specific human and occupational health risks associated with every stage of fossil fuel operations including extraction, refining, manufacturing of by-products, transportation, distribution, and disposal of waste products.

- Residential proximity to oil and gas **extraction** has been found to increase the incidence of respiratory ailments and poor birth outcomes, and is potentially associated with other health harms. Living near coal mines is associated with an increased risk of lung disease and cancers, and weeks lost from school and work. Extraction-related light and noise pollution, water use and pollution, ecosystem degradation, and habitat, livelihood, and community disruption also negatively impact health.

- Proximity to petrochemical **refineries**, and exposure to facilities manufacturing other fossil fuel-derived products are associated with an increased risk of illnesses including childhood asthma and hematological malignancies.

- **Transportation** of fossil fuels has a history of spills and explosions with acute and chronic health impacts for nearby communities and cleanup workers.

- Safe **disposal of fossil fuel waste products** remains a challenge, as waste products contain substances with known health impacts, including heavy metals and toxic chemicals.

- **Workers** at extractive sites and in refineries face additional unique health risks including severe respiratory diseases and highly malignant forms of cancer, as well as injuries from fires and blasts.

- Communities in proximity to fossil fuel activity are subject to **threats and violence**, including but not exclusively when they seek to protect their lands, livelihoods and health. The severity and scale of these harms are amplified within Indigenous communities due to their unique linkages to the territories where they live.

The health risks and impacts of climate change, air pollution, and proximity to extraction and processing sites are not equally distributed. They fall most heavily on communities who are least historically responsible for fossil fuel emissions, with the most limited access to the resources and power needed for redress. This includes populations in the Global South, Indigenous peoples, people facing racial and other forms of discrimination, people experiencing poverty, people with chronic health conditions, and young people.

Phasing out fossil fuel use and extraction offers an opportunity to improve health and address health inequities. Expanding access to energy through distributed, resilient and affordable carbon-free renewable energy systems will have health benefits and will maximize energy savings and efficiency. Phasing out fossil fuels would prevent 3.6 million deaths due to ambient air pollution worldwide annually. The same cannot be said for proposed false solutions, such as carbon capture and storage, which do little to protect health and introduce new risks. To protect health, we need to phase out fossil fuels altogether, taking care to ensure renewable energy projects avoid creating new health risks.

Health professionals work hard to save lives.   It is our duty to prioritize our patients' safety, dignity and comfort and we are duty-bound to speak out about the serious global health risks posed by the continued extraction and use of fossil fuels. Efforts are underway to build low-carbon, sustainable health systems at both national and institutional levels, but to protect the health and lives of current and future generations, we must collectively do much more to rapidly reduce emissions.

Health professionals around the world recognize that all stages of the fossil fuel lifecycle present a grave and escalating threat to human health. We see this in our clinics and hospitals, caring for patients and communities suffering from health impacts of climate change, fossil fuel production, and air pollution. To protect the health of our patients and communities, now and in the future, we join the call for a global Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.