

**Speech by Prof. Paulo Buss,
President of the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA)
at the Opening Ceremony of the 12th World Congress on Public Health
Istanbul, April 27th, 2009**

Your Excellency, President Abdullah GÜL, President of the Republic of Turkey;
Your Excellency, Dr. Margaret CHAN, Director-General of World Health Organization;
Your Excellency, Mr. Kadir TOPBAS, Mayor of Istanbul;
Your Excellency, Minister Recep AKDAG, Minister of Health of Turkey;
Your Excellencies, Ministers of Health present in the 12th World Congress on Public Health, including Minister Temporão, from my country, Brazil;
My good friend Hikmet PEKCAN, President of the Turkish Public Health Association;
Dear colleague Members of the Executive Board of the World Federation of Public Health Associations;
Dear colleague Presidents of the National Associations of Public Health, members of the Federation;
Dear colleague participants of the 12th World Congress on Public Health.

It is with great pleasure and honor that I welcome all of you to the 12th World Congress on Public Health, which the World Federation of Public Health Associations and the Turkish Public Health Association are carrying out in this beautiful city of Istanbul, which has been for centuries and continues to be the bridge between Asia and Europe.

Dear President Gül: In our last visit, in January, at the Ankara Presidential Palace, we were delighted with the opportunity – which we now fulfill – to have your presence here at the opening ceremony of our Congress. This symbolizes the high priority of public health in Turkey. The work carried out by Minister Akdag has been producing excellent results for the Turkish people's health. This is why I want to congratulate the work carried out by Your Excellency. The World Federation also most grateful Your Excellency for the resolute support the Turkish Government provided to our Congress.

I want to thank Mayor Topbas for the warm reception by the people of Istanbul to the participants of the Congress and for the support for the event by the mayor's office.

In paying homage to Dr. Margaret Chan, I would like to salute all public health professionals, which, just as she does, struggle every day for the health of our populations.

By thanking Prof. Hikmet, president of the Turkish Public Health Association, I would like to thank the effort of all Presidents and directors of the National Associations of Public Health for the work they carry out in their countries, advocating adequate and egalitarian health policies and better trained public health professionals and researchers.

I would also like to salute all former presidents of the Federation that have joined us here today and especially thank the members of the Executive Board of the WFPHA, of the Scientific Committee (represented by its president, Prof. Ulrich Laaser), of the Congress Local Committee (represented by Bekir Metin) and of the Secretariat of the Federation for all the effort that was made for us to achieve such a high-level program.

Finally, a special welcome to all public health professionals – practitioners, researchers, teachers and, last but not least, to the students of public health – who come from around the world to participate in this Congress.

The 12th World Congress of Public Health is taking place at an especially difficult time, when many systemic crises (regarding the economy, food security, the environment, energy and ethics, among others) threaten the health of populations and the planet's very survival.

Financial markets melted in front of billions of astonished eyes around the world. Their demise is leaving behind a trail of impressive social atrocities: an overall increase in unemployment rates, which has very well documented effects on human health; a boom in food prices, which will certainly further the spread of hunger and malnutrition; and the loss of housing for millions of people. Many other crises resulting from the irresponsible actions of rich countries, transnational mega-corporations and rich individuals who speculate on the price of commodities, drugs, housing, health services and many other essential goods have been cursing the world. We hope the costs of this dominant model of capitalism are not borne by the poorest countries in the world and the poorest individuals within these countries, who have always suffered this aggression.

The world as a whole and our countries specifically are currently affected by many social and health problems. Poverty is a scourge and it still accompanies humanity. Hundreds of countries and billions of people face, on a daily basis, the absurdity of hunger, unhealthy housing conditions, the lack of freedom, senseless wars, violence and the lack of access to basic social services, like health services, education, water and sanitation etc.

The global imbalances are morally unacceptable and politically unsustainable. I must note the unfairness of key global rules on trade and finance and their asymmetric effects on rich and poor countries, as well as the failure of current international policies to respond adequately to the challenges posed by globalization.

Unsustainable patterns of urbanization, industrialization, waste generation, and energy consumption in more developed, rich, and industrialized countries pose destructive threats to the environment, including progressive global warming. This results in losses in food production, desertification, pollution of air, soil, rivers, aquifers, and oceans, the depletion of woods and forests, and unrecoverable damage to biodiversity.

On the other hand, economic, political and social inequalities – including health inequities – have been excluding an enormous contingent of human beings from the most basic achievements of mankind.

Not only our Federation, but also many social activists, health professionals, other associations, NGOs and many other institutions – as well as researchers in health policies and health systems, using the evidence produced by research – have been pointing out the need to reform health systems around the world as to render them more egalitarian, humanized and effective and developed with the higher standards of quality and good governance. Concerted political action at both the global and national scales is essential in order to face the current global crisis and properly carry out the required reforms.

In times of crisis such as the current one – which are not merely conjunctural, but deeply structural –, it is crucial to fight the 'causes of causes', that is, the social determinants of health, and to do that with broad intersectoral actions, implemented by and under the responsibility of the public sector. This implies an extreme commitment of local governments and the international community with the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. However, there has been

widespread concern that development assistance will decrease and that progress towards the achievement of MDGs will be even slower.

This crisis also demands the development of universal and comprehensive systems of social protection, which would obviously include health. I mean universal health systems, with universal coverage (including the areas of public health, prevention and health promotion), implemented and provided by States and with comprehensive and effective primary health care being prioritized.

We intend to be a strong voice; one that will gather with other voices that fight for those that are not only excluded from the achievements of modern society, but also have now been wretched by the greed of a few privileged individuals who sunk the world in a crisis unmatched in the past 80 years.

The theme of the Congress, "Making a Difference in Global Public Health: Education, Research & Practice", expresses the unambiguous desire of public health professionals to have an active and transformative participation in this world of such serious and complex challenges.

The Congress will address issues in public health, such as its political and practical aspects, as well as research and training of human resources in the area. More than 80 panels, 400 oral presentations and 700 posters have been scheduled. Moreover, a very important set of public health professionals that contribute to the international debate in the health field will be participating, which demonstrates the strong commitment of researchers, educators and practitioners of public health worldwide.

Both as a discipline and a practice, the field of public health – together with the people – can contribute to mitigate the effects of the crisis on the health of the population, and we are ready to do so. Your Federation has developed a Strategic Plan 2007-2012 to carry out those broad set of commitments.

Therefore, as a first step, I welcome all of you so that, together, we may have an excellent Congress.

Thank you very much.