

PEOPLE'S HEALTH ASSEMBLY 2000: a resounding success

Two years in the making and mere five days of beehive activity and the Assembly convened and launched its grand beginning. Surpassing all expectations, we finally had almost 1,500 participants from 94 countries in attendance. Nobody was let down: the program lived up to everybody's expectations. There was energy in the air and participation was very active. The mornings' program covered 5 main topics: Health, Life and Well-being, Inequality, Poverty and Health, Health Care and Health Services (for the poor), Environment and Survival, and the Ways Forward. For each topic, people from all over the world presented testimonials illustrating concrete cases of both oppression and successful people's organizations. A microphone remained always open in the plenary session floor for people to react in any way they wanted to any of the presenters' points...and it was used profusely...

The afternoons saw the unfolding of over 100 highly participative concurrent sessions that allowed participants to discuss much more specific issues of their immediate interest – all of them related to a people's perspective and outlook on the grave health problems befalling the poor in each of their countries.

The evenings were filled with more special interest sessions, both individual and by geographic regions, as well as with artistic performances from the world over. Stalls and exhibitions welcomed many visitors. The days were full 16-hour days (20-hour for the organizers) with plenty of time for community and sharing of meals by the participants. A daily newsletter was produced every night to highlight the most salient events.

The local organization called Gonoshasthaya Kendra, our Bangladeshi host NGO in their beautiful campus outside Dhaka, was commendable and the support by the local community great; their women prepared and served our meals as an income generation project. After laborious participatory reworking, participants adopted the PEOPLE'S CHARTER FOR HEALTH. This groundbreaking manifest, together with the PHA Framework Paper and four topical Background Papers which clearly spell out what PHA stands for can be found in PHA website at www.pha2000.org

Of course, what counts in all of this is the ways forward. The last day of the Assembly was totally devoted to this. The voices of over 100 participants were heard and their suggestions recorded on six big flipcharts on stage. A sampler of some of the suggestions includes wide dissemination of the Charter, the organization of a solid network and sub-networks on specific issues using the website, mailing lists and e-mail list-servers, the translation of PHA documents into many languages including simple language versions, setting up local level people's health watches and when needed people's health tribunals, continuing a publications activity starting with the proceedings of the Assembly and the posting of a monthly newsletter on the web, etc. It is never too late to join the People's Health Assembly movement – either as individuals or organizations. Just drop us a line at phasec@pha2000.org or gksavar@citechco.net and regularly visit our website. Claudio Schuftan, Hanoi, aviva@netnam.vn



Coordinating Group of the PHA: Asian Community Health Action Network (ACHAN); Consumers International (CI); Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF); Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK); Health Action International (HAI); International People's Health Council (IPHC); Third World Network (TWN); Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR)



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ASIA

Bangladesh: After the successful PHA-2000 event (4-8 December 2001) at GK, Savar, Dhaka, the PHA-Bangladesh Chapter has been actively involved in some post-PHA activities. Some of the activities are highlighted here. The 13-member *ad-hoc* committee of the PHA-Bangladesh Chapter has been formed. Mr Sultan Mahmud, Save the Children Australia (SCA) has been nominated as the convener of the committee. The *ad-hoc* committee meeting is being convened monthly. This committee has started to develop a strategy paper to carry forward the People's Charter for Health declaration. The Bangla translation of the People's Charter for Health has been done. Printed Bangla version will be disseminated among the members of the PHA-Bangladesh Chapter and others. PROSHIKHA proposed adding the Charter to literacy materials or magazines published by it for neo-literates.

India: A post-PHA national working group meeting was held in India from 13 to 14 January 2001. The national working group meeting has decided that 7 April 2001 will be observed nationally as the Health Rights Day, having the district headquarters as the centres of activities. On this day, the *Jan Swasthya Abhiyan* (JSA) will be launched formally and publicly; the final 'People's Charter for Health', 'Health Care as a Fundamental Right' and 'Right to Health Information' will be parts of the campaign. A suitable seminar or meeting will be held at each district headquarters and at the state level. A national policy dialogue on the issue 'Sex Selective Abortion' (SSA) would be organized from 14 to 15 April 2001 at Rohtak. Anti-AIDS drugs are highly expensive as most of the costs are due to patents. Indian companies can produce these drugs, as they do not yet have to follow product patents. JSA should lobby with Indian drug companies to produce and supply these drugs at affordable rates. A seminar on this issue is being organized in May 2001. Moreover, a series of policy dialogues has been planned as JSA activities.

A meeting was held in Bangalore on the 16th February and reflections on Kolkata and Dhaka assemblies were presented to all the State invitees. A poster exhibition with 40 posters on the whole event from district level to Dhaka was also organized. A special editorial written on both Kolkata and Dhaka events and the 'People's Charter for Health' was published in the *Medical National Journal* of India March-April 2001 issue. WHO has invited Ravi Narayan, one of our members, to give a keynote address on 25th April 2001 in Geneva and introduce the 'People's Charter for Health' at the meeting. The JSA should act as a catalyst for district and village level monitoring of health services.

Nepal: In Nepal, the process of forming the National Committee for Post-PHA 2000 is on. The Nepali version of the 'People's Charter for Health' has been published and it is being disseminated to wider audience. A regional meeting of the key NGO representatives of South Asia and formulation of a strategic action plan at the regional and national level are being planned. ACHAN is going to take the lead in this regard.

Sri Lanka: In Sri Lanka, the 'People's Charter for Health' is being translated into Sinhala and Tamil languages. A major initiative in rational drug use is seriously being considered. A brief report is being completed.

ARAB COUNTRIES

The draft Arabic translation of the People's Charter for Health has been done. It is in the process of finalization. The PHA activists in the Arab countries are holding post-PHA meetings in different Arab countries. The Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees (UPMRC) has been awarded the UAE Health Foundation Award for the year 2001 by WHO. PHA sends the UPMRC hearty congratulations on their winning the award.

THE AMERICAS

In **Canada**, a briefing was held in Ottawa where the participants from the PHA shared their experience with the persons from organizations that had been involved in earlier pre-assembly activities. The **Latin American** participants at the PHA-2000 event in Dhaka have developed a loose e-mail network in Spanish for the people from the region and others with interest in and connections with Latin America. If anyone is interested, one may contact at the following network REDLATINOAMERICANASALUD@yahoo.com.

Julio Monsalvo from **Argentina** has written two extensive articles published in the *El Medico*, a publication of the Institute for Popular Culture, which is sent to over 15,000 professionals. The articles have been also reproduced on the Internet. In June 2001, there will be seminar on "Globalization, Health and Development" in **Ecuador**, involving persons who participated at the PHA-2000 event. The **Jamaican** Ministry of Health responded to the report from the People's Health Assembly held at Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK), Dhaka, Bangladesh, from 4 to 8 December 2000. The Ministry has decided to collaborate with the medical students at the University of the West Indies Mona on staging a People's Health Assembly in Jamaica. The Ministry has proposed to hold this assembly in September 2001. UWIMSA – Jamaica is waiting on a request for collaboration from the University of the West Indies Council before the beginning of preliminary discussion on the Jamaica People's Health Assembly with the Jamaican Ministry of Health. The involvement of the members of the IFMSA family at this assembly is also being considered.

AUSTRALIA

The People's Charter for Health has been placed on the Australian PBAC protest site as a key policy resource. PBAC is a website protesting about the current hijack of Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) of Australia by the multinational pharmaceutical industry (Pfizer), aided and abetted by the Federal Health Minister of Australia. Dr Ken Harvey have been involved in fighting changes to the Australian Pharmaceutical Ben-

efits Scheme, which is under attack from a right-wing government and an aggressive pharmaceutical industry. A Federal election is coming up in Australia later this year. A PHA member in Australia (Ken Harvey) has been working through the Australian Consumers' Association, Public Health association and other organizations with the aim to spread the People's Charter for Health (PHA Charter), philosophy and call for action. The PHA members have made some progress in this regard. In the last two State elections, the people have thrown out the right-wing, business-oriented, neo-liberal governments in Western Australia and Queensland and replaced them with Labor governments. It is expected that the same thing will happen in the forthcoming Federal elections later this year.

EUROPE

The activities in the Europe region have centered around 1) the People's Charter for Health, 2) ideas and preparations for the World Health Assembly both this year and next, 3) building up the network, and 4) particular work around GATS. The G8 is going to meet in Genoa on 21 July 2001. There is a health agenda to be discussed at this meeting. The participants of the European region are scheduled to meet on 4th April 2001 in London to plan and develop the strategy for post-PHA activities. Some of the country-wise activities in Europe are mentioned below.

Belgium: Medical Aid for the Third World is building its own websites mostly in Dutch and French. The People's Charter for Health in Dutch is on the website www.g3w.be. Some links to websites in English language health and development are also available. The NGOs Forum will be having a parallel meeting (10-20 May 2001) with the upcoming UNCTAD Conference on the Least Developed Countries to be held from 14 to 20 May 2001 in Brussels. Health is one of the issues at the conference mainly taken up by Oxfam-International. The Belgian NGOs, with participation by others, will organize solidarity activity on 12 May (Saturday) 2001 at the Cinquantaire park in Brussels. A successful symposium on Health and Globalization of the Medical Aid for the Third World and Medicine for the People, organized by Bert de Belder and Mie Branders, was held on 3 and 4 February in Belgium. The PHA was also discussed there.

Greece: The People's Charter for Health has been translated into Greek. PHA activists have been involved in the translation work there. A public meeting was held in Thessaloniki, Greece, where Alexis Benos spoke on Globalization, Health and the PHA. There was an enthusiastic discussion and certain activities related to the Charter are being planned, particularly around privatisation of health care. The International Association for Health Policy is organizing its 12th European Conference in London from 9 to 12 May 2001.

The Netherlands: From The Netherlands, Françoise Barten reports that he has recommended inclusion of the People's Charter for Health in the literature list (obligatory) of a module in the medical curriculum of his Faculty at the University of Nijmegen. The University has accepted his recommendation. In 2001, the International Federation of medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary. This IFMSA meeting is called as the International Training Congress for Medical Students will take place in Denmark, from 4 to 12 August 2001. Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury of Gonoshasthaya Kendra, Bangladesh is being invited to the meeting as a global participant. IFMSA as a

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CONTACT the **Regional Coordinators** at your respective regions/countries to get into the PHA loop!
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worldwide organization having local bodies in 68 countries with the potential of reaching over 1.5 million medical students, have an aim to use the anniversary year to improve its strategies to help build a healthier future for the local communities. The primary goal of the anniversary meeting is to provide an opportunity to over 550 medical students leaders from all over the world to be trained as key human resources. Ten parallel workshops will be offered covering a wide range of issues. Some of the speakers at the congress may include Reverend Desmond Tutu and Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan.

Russia: The People's Health Charter has been translated into Russian and a print-run of 1,000 copies has been printed. The Russian version of the PHA health charter was presented at a meeting of the Women's Health in St Petersburg. At the meeting, 64 NGOs, Deputies of the Legislative Assembly of St Petersburg, health care and social authorities were present. The vice-chairman of the Legislative Assembly is going to organize a special hearing of the Charter at the assembly. The participants of the meeting supported it and opposed the depleted uranium arms anywhere. The Russian version has been sent to UK for the Russian-speaking people there. A video on the PHA has been made. Now the copies of Russian version of the Charter are being disseminated in Russia and its former Republics.

The Ukraine: The Ukrainian version of the

People's Charter for Health has been put on website. It has been disseminated to 600 e-mail addresses. Information on the PHA and its Charter was published in three newspapers. The Ukrainian and English versions can be sighted on the website, www.medsoc.dp.ua. The Ukrainian NGO Net was contacted for discussion on the People's Charter for Health. On 1st March 2001, Svitlana took part in Internet discussion in the Ukrainian NGO Net about The World Bank activities in Ukraine. She expressed her opinion about the reconstruction of The World Bank activity in Ukraine according to the principles of the People's Charter for Health.

UK: It has been learnt that Alifia Chakera is the new Policy Officer of One World Action UK. Her job is to introduce PHA and promote the principles of the People's Charter for health to decision-making bodies within the EU and UK.

PEOPLE'S CHARTER FOR HEALTH IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

The translation of the 'People's Charter for Health' in different languages of the world is progressing successfully. So far, the Charter has been translated into 34 major languages of the world. Bangla translation of the Charter has been done. The printing and dissemination of the Bangla version is being contemplated. In India, the Charter has been translated into 20 local languages including Hindi. Mr Venkatash of India is making tape-version for the blind people. Dutch, French, German, Greek, Nepali, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Urdu and Ukrainian versions of the Charter have been already done. Finnish and Swedish versions are underway. The Charter in Japanese and

Chinese languages is in progress. In Sri Lanka, the 'People's Charter for Health' has been translated into Sinhala and Tamil languages. The Arabic version is in progress also. The Charter in Spanish is being printed in two versions – one in Mexico and the Central America with documents from pre-assembly activities, and another in Ecuador for post-assembly meeting in June 2001.

French version video on the PHA-2000 is now available. Another video in English on the PHA-2000 event at GK, Dhaka, is also available. Joy Banerjee has done it. If anyone likes to dub it in one's own language, one can do it and let us know it.

If undelivered, please return to :
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