

Islamic Republic of Mauritania

Positions for the World Health Organization

I. Addressing Chronic Cardiovascular and Lifestyle-Related Diseases

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania recognizes how cardiovascular disease (CVD) and lifestyle-related diseases like Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and Type 2 Diabetes (T2D) are prevailing issues for the world. They were the cause of 17.5 million deaths last year; statistically, they are not a top priority for Mauritania. Only 2.7% of our population has been diagnosed with CVD, 1.8% with COPD, and 2% with T2D. Mauritania also recognizes that the African continent accounts for 14% of the world's population, yet it offers the lowest output of medical research as a continent. Africa needs more than just imported measures from more developed countries. Mauritania is therefore taking preventative measures to combat these world issues.

The community of lower and middle income countries are in urgent need of medical education, administrative support, and management skills. As a preventative measure Mauritania is engaged in a partnership with Sustain Health Development in Africa through Responsible Education (SHARE). The mission is to contribute to the global reduction of CVD through training and education with the aim of developing local cardiovascular units to help reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease in adults and children. SHARE is interested in expanding its program to include more low and middle income countries. Mauritania is aware of the growing prevalence of diabetes in Africa; it is estimated that the burden of diabetes and IGT (Impaired Glucose Tolerance) will almost double by 2025. The rate at which new cases of diabetes are emerging poses an additional burden on countries already stretched to the limit by common life-threatening infections, such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS. Mauritania is developing an education based prevention system, similar to the WHO's, designed to educate people on the easy steps that can be taken towards diabetes prevention. To combat COPD, Mauritania is taking advantage of working with GARD (the Global Alliance against Chronic Respiratory Diseases), which is a voluntary alliance of national and international organizations, institutions and agencies from a range of countries working towards a common goal of improving global lung health. Our combined vision is a world where all people breathe freely. GARD promotes an integrated approach that capitalizes upon synergies of chronic respiratory diseases with other chronic diseases while focusing specifically on the needs of low and middle income countries. As a result Mauritania has seen a 15% reduction in cases of asthma in children ages 4 to 15 and a 9% reduction in adults ages 16 and over.

As a result of Mauritania's success would like to see other lower and middle income countries making similar changes to improve their county's health. Preventive programs such as SHARE and GARD are relatively inexpensive and a proactive approach to diseases that can bring large economic burdens.

II. Addressing Food Safety

Mauritania is concerned with three areas of food safety: genetically modified foods (GMF,) protecting food against terrorist acts, and the standards of food safety regulations. 85% of Mauritania's population is diagnosed with mild to moderate food poisoning each year; this statistic shows the need to strengthen food safety education programs for the prevention of food borne diseases. During the fifty-third session of the Regional Committee for Africa, the UN established urgency in strengthening food safety programs. The resolution would commit member countries to integrate food safety matters into education and information programs for consumers. At the fifty-seventh session the Regional strategy on food safety was endorsed by Mauritania, and included an educational program called the Five Keys to Safer Food Project (FKSFP).

In addition to FKSFP, Mauritania is interested in working with a larger, more economically stable country such as the United States to initiate a Food Trade program. As a country, the United States is capable of producing greater and fresher food stuffs than Mauritania. Mauritania suggests that the U.S. encourage its citizens in whatever way possible to buy more fresh fruit and vegetables. Surpluses should be donated or sold in the form of canned food

to Mauritania or other low-middle countries struggling with growing and storing fresh food at a discounted price. Mauritania wants to work with the WHO to create and implement food safety standards, but until this point can be reached, Mauritania is in great need of help to safely feed its people.

With regards to terrorism in food safety, Mauritania proposes working with the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD). The Arab Fund is a system of member states working together to improve the social and economic health of Islamic and Arab countries. The Arab Fund participates in the Joint Technical Meeting, between the Arab Coordination Group Institutions and the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The meeting was hosted by the OPEC Fund (OFID), and was attended by the operations managers from the Arab Coordination Group Institutions, members of the OECD DAC, and key figures from the OECD countries. The meeting addressed three issues: namely, food security in the Arab World, energy for the poor, and areas of co-operation between the Arab Coordination Group Institutions with respect to projects in Yemen. Together with the Kuwaiti Fund, the Arab Fund participated in the preparation and presentation of a paper addressing food security, while the Arab Fund, in coordination with Saudi Fund, prepared and presented a paper outlining areas of co-operation between the Arab Coordination Group Institutions. Mauritania wishes to reach out to the AFESD through the UN and bring their knowledge and resources to countries in need, such as Mauritania.

Mauritania is willing to open its borders to research exploring the safe growth and storage of genetically modified foods in a sub-Saharan environment. The government agreed to donate 6,000 acres of land to aid in such a project. The Mauritanian government views food safety as its responsibility to its people. The application of modern biotechnology to food production presents new opportunities for our health. The potential benefits to the public health sector include altering the nutrient content of foods, decreasing their allergenic potential, and improving the efficiency of food production systems. Modern biotechnology must be thoroughly evaluated in order to generate a true improvement for food production in the sub-Saharan environment.

Mauritania wants to be a model country for the WHO, advancing the research on food safety while targeting high risk groups such as school children, women, street food vendors, and food handlers. Collaboration between the Five Keys initiative and other initiatives, such as the health-promotion, IMCI, child survival programs, and initiatives that focus on women could improve existing food safety programs.

III. Accelerating Progress against Neglected Tropical Diseases

In October 2006, Mauritania and other UN member states signed a five year agreement to support the fight against top ranked neglected tropical diseases: leprosy, lymphatic filariasis, leishmaniasis, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis, and soil-transmitted helminthes. Mauritania is protecting facilities distributing medication within its borders while also opening them to NGO medical relief organizations. In February 2006, the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) and the WHO signed the Memorandum of Understanding for the development and evaluation of new diagnostic tests for these diseases and medication research on mebendazole resistance. A grant from the Gates Foundation totaling \$25 million US dollars, and included unlimited free medicine, donated by FIND made all this possible. This allows access to remote areas of the country most affected by these diseases, promotes local research, and provides local medical assistance to those in need.

Mauritania recognizes multiple voices calling for the world's attention is more effective than singular, disjointed efforts. The separate disease programs aimed at controlling or eliminating these diseases have merged to form the Neglected Tropical Disease Coalition (NTDC.) Open to all interested parties, the NTDC is composed of individual disease alliances, international agencies, corporate partners, academic institutions, faith-based groups, and NGO. The formation of NTDC has encouraged Mauritania's neighboring UN Members Algeria, Mali, Western Sahara and Morocco to consider joining research with the WHO, CDC, and NTDC. Their allegiance would provide a wide enough demographic for sufficient information for the WHO and make programs more efficient for Islamic communities that normally reject western medicine.

To prevent these diseases from occurring, Mauritania is proposing to the NTDC, WHO, UN and other member states to create N.E.E.M (Neem Tree Ecological Educational Medi-Program.) The Neem Tree is used as a tool for prevention and a solution in these neglected tropical diseases and much more. The Neem tree has had proven success as an: anti-bacterial, anti-viral, anti-septic, anti-diabetic, anti-fungal, blood-purifying agent, and spermicidal agent. In addition to medicinal purposes, one of the most valued benefits of neem spray is in the garden as a pesticide. It is completely non-toxic to humans, other mammals, birds, and is even beneficial to "good" insects such

as bees. Neem can be an economical stimulant and reduces the need for foreign aid. The positive environmental effects of the neem tree are infinite. A few positive environmental effects include reducing: desertification, overgrazing, and deforestation. To show potential investors the strengths of neem we have planted over 200,000 neem trees and created the Mauritanian Neem Tree Foundation, which will be opening its doors later next year.