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Climate and Health Experts Commit to Tackle the Deadly Consequences of Heat, Hong Kong, China, 17-20 December

Amid calls from the international community for greater action on climate change, a global network of scientists and practitioners today launched a new initiative to reduce the devastating health impacts of heat waves and extreme heat. The First Global Forum on Heat and Health brought together over 120 climate and health experts from 33 countries to strengthen cooperation in science. The network aims to build the capacity of governments, organizations, and professionals to protect populations from the avoidable health risks of extreme and ambient heat.

Worldwide experts agree extreme hot weather is having devastating consequences for human health in all inhabited world regions. For many places, heat waves kill more people than any other weather-related disaster. Researchers in Hong Kong told the First Global Forum on Heat and Health that in highly urbanized and densely populated parts of the Asian city every 1 degree Celsius increase in maximum daytime temperature above 28.2 degrees Celsius results in a 1.8 percent increase in mortality. Experts note that the world could reach a level of more than 80-90% urbanization by the last quarter of the century, placing extremely large populations at risk.

Attendees participated in a mock emergency exercise of a high impact heat wave event with many casualties where participants learned the effectiveness of timely, clear and concise communication with the public, media, governments and stakeholders to prevent and reduce health impacts. The forum launched a global network which will seek to build diverse partnerships, improve available evidence and actionable information for planning and preparedness, enhance global heat wave prediction capabilities; and promote life-saving and promoting heat-resilient interventions such as community outreach and early warning systems.

The diverse network of professionals from many fields, including medical doctors, meteorologists, architects, and urban designers - committed to work together to improve risk monitoring capabilities, including meteorological information and warnings, and health surveillance. Experts will share its recommendations with its partner organizations, including the World Meteorological Organization and World Health Organization, recognizing their importance in providing guidance for addressing these risks.

“The 2018 was the 4th warmest year on record, one of 20 warmest years that have occurred in the past 22 years. Many parts of the world experienced, exceptional heat prolonged heat waves and associated wildfires.” said Elena Manaenkova, WMO Deputy Secretary-General. “Hot extremes will increase in the future so that the risk to human health. Heat warnings and related weather and climate services are critical to mitigate this risk. Therefore, WHO and WMO is tackling urgent action and bringing health experts and meteorologists together to enhance heat-health services to public”.

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