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## Fossil fuels: Health professionals call for legally binding plan for global phase out

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Healthcare professionals have urged governments across the world to lay out a legally binding plan to phase out fossil fuel use worldwide as part of efforts to tackle the climate crisis.

The World Health Organization, the International Paediatric Association, the World Medical Association, the Alliance of Nurses for a Healthy Environment, and the World Federation of Public Health Associations are among 192 signatories of an open letter calling for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.<sup>1</sup>

Other sectors, including faith organisations and city governments, have supported the call for the evidence based international treaty, which focuses on ending use of coal, oil, and gas, substances deemed detrimental to human and planetary health.

Harjeet Singh, global engagement director of the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative, said, “We are thrilled to see health professionals step out of their operating rooms, clinics, and offices to support the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty for the sake of people and the planet, alongside a growing chorus of heads of government, Nobel laureates, leading academics, and civil society.

“The world is waking up to the reality of the climate crisis, which is inextricably tied to millions of lives and their health. It’s time for world leaders to meet the bar for climate leadership by working together to end the fossil fuel era in a way that is fair and fast.”

The treaty group said that 3.6 million deaths worldwide resulting from ambient air pollution could be prevented every year if fossil fuels were phased out and that the same effect could not be achieved through other proposed solutions, such as carbon capture and storage.

The treaty declares that burning fossil fuels poses threats to human and planetary health, including air pollution, which causes over seven million premature deaths every year. It also creates optimum conditions for the transmission of food and waterborne diseases and spread of vectorborne diseases because of global heating, as well as increasing the risk of droughts and floods. Renewable energy projects also need to be designed to avoid introducing new health risks, it adds.

It notes that each stage of fossil fuel operations poses further health risks. For instance, spills and explosions during transportation can result in acute and chronic health effects among local communities and cleanup workers; safe disposal of fossil fuel waste products and toxic chemicals is a problem; and workers at extractive sites and refineries face risks

such as respiratory diseases and highly malignant forms of cancer.

Jeni Miller, executive director of the Global Climate and Health Alliance, said, “Air pollution kills over seven million people a year worldwide, while over 90% people in the world live in places that exceed World Health Organization limits for air pollution.

“Phasing out fossil fuels would prevent 3.6 million air pollution deaths per year, an immense near term health benefit to achieve the steps essential to mitigating climate change in the long term.”

The treaty also tackles health inequality, given that the burden of air pollution and proximity to extraction and processing sites falls most heavily on populations in poor countries, indigenous peoples, young people, and other groups who face discrimination, poverty, and chronic health conditions.

Its three key areas of focus are ending expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure and production, phasing out existing production and use in line with the target not to exceed 1.5°C of global heating, and providing a fast track real solution and a just transition for workers, communities, and countries.

<sup>1</sup> Health professionals call for Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty to protect lives of current and future generations. <https://fossilfuel treaty.org/health-letter>.