

PLEDGE OF COMMITMENT

by the

PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA

to the

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS FOR CHILDREN INITIATIVE

– IN SOUTH AFRICA

WE THE LEADERSHIP & PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA

RECOGNIZING THAT

- Up to one-third of the burden of death and disease in the world is attributable to factors in the environment;*
- Over 40% of the environment-related burden of disease is borne by children under the age of 5 years, who make up only around 10% of the world's population;*
- Children are particularly vulnerable to environmental exposures because of their relatively high rates of ingestion, respiration and metabolism, their incompletely developed bodies, and their exploratory behaviour;*
- Poverty & inequity are major determinants of environmental quality and exposures in children;*
- Poor nutritional status exacerbates childhood vulnerability to environmental exposures;*

- *Large numbers of South African children may be exposed to environmental chemicals such as lead and pesticides;*
- *A large proportion of environmental hazards to which children are exposed, occur in the settings in which they live, learn, play and in some instances work - their homes, schools & playgrounds:*
 - *Around half of South African households, and the children therein, may be exposed to indoor air pollution from the domestic use of polluting fuels (wood, coal, cow dung, crop waste, paraffin), contributing to elevated levels of acute respiratory infections;*
 - *Mainly because of inadequate access to water supplies, sanitation services, nutrient-poor foods, poor food preparation & storage facilities & practices, and poor personal and environmental hygiene practices, many children in South African continue to bear a heavy burden of diarrhoeal disease;*
 - *Too many unnecessary deaths and disabling injuries occur in children from unintentional injuries such as burns, poisoning (such as from paraffin ingestion) and drowning incidents;*
 - *Many children may be exposed to environmental hazards as a consequence of work they are required to do – both paid and unpaid.*
- *Exposure to environmental threats in early childhood may lead to irreversible, life-long consequences for health and productivity.*

*A*CKNOWLEDGING THAT

- *Healthy Environments for Children are an essential pre-requisite for Sustainable Development;*
- *Environmental risks to children's health are multi-factorial, and may emanate from the air that they breathe, the food they eat, the water they drink and the soil to which they become exposed;*
- *The state of the environment (air, food, water & soil) may be affected by actions and inaction across a wide range of sectors, including health, housing, water, sanitation, waste disposal, education, energy, water, trade, industry, agriculture, labour, planning and finance;*
- *There is a need to expand and scale up action around Healthy Environments for Children;*

- *Healthy Environments for Children need to be placed higher up on political agendas than in the past;*
- *Cross-sectoral planning & action is key in moving toward Healthy Environments for Children;*
- *It is critical that we tackle the environmental risks to children's health in the places in which they live, learn and play, and in some instances, in which they work;*
- *With limited resources, we need to seek new and innovative ways of working toward Healthy Environments for Children, and to strengthen existing community initiatives;*
- *The role of the private sector is important in Healthy Environments for Children;*
- *The participation of communities & community organizations in efforts toward Healthy Environments for Children is vital. Volunteers, for example, have a fundamental role to play;*
- *In creating environments that protect and promote the health and well-being of children, we protect the health and well-being of the majority of South Africans, and provide an essential foundation for sustainable development;*
- *The involvement of all spheres of government is critical for the provision of Healthy Environments for Children. Local governments have a particularly important role to play,*

PLEDGE TO

- *Place issues of Children, Environment & Health higher up on political and action agendas in South Africa;*
- *Establish and build a strong & active Healthy Environments for Children Initiative, leading to a Healthy Environments for Children Alliance in South Africa, in association with the World Health Organization's Healthy Environments for Children Alliance;*
- *Undertake an in-depth assessment of the range & nature of environmental risks to the health of children in South Africa;*
- *Create increased awareness nationally of the links between the environment and the health of children through, for example, the establishment of Healthy Environments for Children Centres in key areas across the country;*

- *In consultation with communities, develop a joint Healthy Environments for Children Alliance (South Africa) Plan of Action to address environmental hazards threatening the health of children;*
- *Ensure that the Healthy Environments for Children Alliance (South Africa) Plan of Action will give special emphasis to the roles of poverty, malnutrition & food insecurity, which exacerbate children's exposure and vulnerability to environmental risks;*
- *Expand efforts around joint, holistic, health-based planning and delivery across sectors to create Healthy Environments for Children, especially in settings such as homes, schools and playgrounds;*
- *Critically assess the role and need for strengthening of existing initiatives related to Healthy Environments for Children;*
- *Put in place the mechanisms for critical research, monitoring, surveillance and evaluation of the initiatives of the Healthy Environments for Children Alliance (South Africa);*
- *Provide children with life skills education with a strong emphasis on health promotion for healthy choices;*
- *Ensure that Primary Health Care in South Africa is aligned with the principles & strategies of the Healthy Environments for Children Alliance, and strengthened to ensure that all sectors in the country take account of health, especially the health of children, in their development planning, decision-making and programme implementation.*
- *Commit critical resources toward the creation of Healthy Environments for Children in South Africa*

AND CALL ON

- *The people of our nation to unite with us in our determined efforts toward the creation of Healthy Environments for Children, and for all, in South Africa;*
- *The children of South Africa to join and guide us in our efforts to ensure that the environments in which they live, learn and grow promote their health and well-being, and their ability and right to lead productive and valued lives.*

World Health Day, 7 April 2003, South Africa

