

**Cecil B. Wilson, MD, MACP  
President, World Medical Association  
Valedictory Address  
General Assembly, Fortaleza 2013  
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Members of the World Medical General Assembly, colleagues, guests and our hosts the Brazilian Medical Association:

Since my inauguration last year in Bangkok, it has been my privilege to represent the World Medical Association (WMA) around the world.

I've traveled to at a total of five continents, twelve countries and attended twenty-nine meetings and conferences.

I've also reported on my travels and the varied and important activities of this organization on the WMA website through the President's Blog.

The message I have carried may be summed up as follows:

1. The moral imperative of ethics in medicine
2. The challenge of noncommunicable disease and the social determinants of health
3. The threat of climate change

First, the moral imperative of ethics in medicine

As you all are aware, the WMA has been very involved in the process of bringing the Declaration of Helsinki (DOH) up to date in anticipation of its fiftieth anniversary in 2014.

The Expert Conferences convened in Cape Town, South Africa, Tokyo, Japan and Washington, DC, brought together experts in ethics, members of the medical profession, educators and governmental officials to provide input.

The conferences are part of the multi-year effort by the World Medical Association to examine the DOH to determine if changes are needed.

In examining the DOH for potential changes the WMA has focused on transparency and on obtaining a diversity of opinions from experts around the world.

At this meeting, we see the culmination of many hours' work by the workgroup, and especially the facilitating group, who had the unenviable task of taking mountains of comments and distilling them into a new more understandable document.

In addition, the transparency of the process that encouraged involvement by experts in the field and the public is an affirmation that the end product will preserve the DOH as the gold standard for ethical principles in research involving human subjects.

### Second, the challenge of noncommunicable disease and the social determinants of health

The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age; and the societal influences on these conditions.

They are major influences on both quality of life, including good health, and length of disability-free life expectancy.

The primary responsibility for addressing the social determinants of health is that of government and society.

In March I attended the Institute of Health Equity (IHE) which makes recommendations for actions and provides analysis in core areas of work for physicians:

1. Workforce education and training as well as individuals and communities
2. Government organizations and working in partnership and as advocates
3. Challenges and opportunities in the health system.

The WMA believes in the importance of health care system strengthening, universal access and emphasizing social determinants of health as the right approach in fighting NCDS.

At all WHO events on this topic, the WMA will advocate for a holistic approach that puts social determinants of health at the forefront of thinking about health care.

### Third, the threat of climate change

Climate change due to global warming is reality of life on our planet today.

It has health effects that are significant and already being felt.

For example extreme heat events are more frequent, of longer duration and more severe, causing increased deaths in the tens of thousands yearly.

Early research suggests that mitigation of the effects of climate change may have a link with prevention and might have significant health benefits for both individuals and populations.

In climate change vernacular, mitigation and adaptation are the buzzwords.

The WMA is committed to being involved in the mitigation of climate change - that is attempting to slow or reverse climate change by decreasing greenhouse gas production through implementation of green policies.

Including for example extremes of weather such as heat events and torrential downpours and flooding;

Changes in insect disease vector populations, and adverse effects on food sources brought on by droughts.

As another part of ongoing efforts to support responses to climate change, the WMA established an environmental caucus which meets regularly in conjunction with WMA meetings.

Last fall the caucus surveyed WMA members to assess implementation of WMA's green policies within its membership.

The goal was to evaluate medical associations' involvement in those areas and get useful guidance for potential additional activities.

Based on the results of the environmental caucus survey, WMA members report they are engaged in dealing with climate change and have a variety of suggestions about how further progress can be accomplished.

In conclusion, as I stated in my inaugural address,

I still believe that in spite of the constancy of change and the unexpected events of our lives,

We as physicians can open new doors, share new insights, find new cures, prevent disease

We can help our patients the world over to live healthier, happier, longer more productive lives.

I thank you for the great honor of contributing to these ideals as WMA President over the past year, and I look forward to more opportunities to create a brighter future of medicine.

Cecil B. Wilson, MD