

**Panel discussion on "Globalization and Health"
24 October 2008**

Background Document

The impact of globalization on health is complex, but it is clear that, with globalization, health has become increasingly a key consideration in foreign policy, well beyond its historical place as a "mere humanitarian" endeavour subordinate to the national interests of survival, security, power, and influence.

Globalization has forced policy makers to confront the realities of an epidemiologically interdependent world and the complexities of the global cooperation needed to protect and promote public health. The worsening of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, threats from emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases such as SARS and avian influenza, fears about bioterrorism, and controversies involving trade and health (e.g. TRIPS and access to medicines) have forced foreign policy makers to grapple with issues and principles of public health.

In order to craft health policy today, governments must find mechanisms to manage health risks that spill into and out of every country. Even though much of what affects health today is transnational in nature, countries remain core actors that must reorient their health and foreign policies in ways that align their national interests with the diplomatic, epidemiological and ethical realities of a globalized world. This alignment involves governments adjusting to globalization by overcoming fragmented policy competencies in national governance systems.

Even national health systems, which remain largely national in terms of service delivery, training and regulation, the impact of globalization can be seen through the migration of health professionals and the transborder provision of health care. A lack of trained health care workers has become a crisis in many developing countries, largely due to migration to countries with more attractive salaries and working and living conditions.

Although developed and developing countries alike are affected by globalization and its impact on health and development, as usual developing countries feel the negative impact much more than developed countries. The poorest populations are also the most vulnerable to the effects of an unhealthy environment, a lack of social services, and inadequate infrastructure.

The health effects of globalization and development are not limited to infectious diseases. Urbanization brings additional environmental health challenges. Changes in diet and physical activity that accompany economic development and urbanization too

often result in higher risks of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and other non-