

Editorial – The Lancet

Christiana Figueres Joins the Lancet Countdown – Delivering on the Promise of Paris

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The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change marked historic progress for the planet and human health. Signatories agreed to limit global temperature rise to “well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels”; redouble a global commitment of financial flows to developing countries of 100 billion USD annually by 2020; and created a mechanism to increase ambitious action.¹ Although inaction threatens to undermine 50 years of progress in public health, meeting the Paris Agreement’s ambitions presents the greatest global health opportunity of this century.² The challenge now lies in implementation.

Whilst the development and signing of the Paris Agreement was an international effort, the charge was led by one woman – Christiana Figueres. She took to the helm of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – the mechanism underpinning international action on climate change – as its Executive Secretary in 2009, challenged with securing a safe path forward for the Convention and the world’s climate. Building a cross-sectoral and international coalition, she helped shepherd the Paris Agreement to its signing in Paris, December 2015.

The international ratification of the most ambitious climate treaty in history has set the momentum for tackling climate change. Even with the departure of the US from the Agreement, 196 other countries are united in their commitment to prevent a global climate catastrophe. One country dropping out will not change the course of action.

The medical community has three crucial roles to play in addressing climate change and acting upon the momentum created by the Paris Agreement. Firstly, we need bold leadership and a strong voice, communicating to patients and advocating to government that climate change is fundamentally a public health issue. Secondly, the health benefits of responding to climate change must be realised and maximised globally. Finally, we must benchmark and monitor efforts to meet and overcome these challenges. Only then can the true impact of climate change on health be understood, and the health benefits of responding to climate change be realised.

The *Lancet Countdown: Tracking Progress on Health and Climate Change* is meeting these needs.³ By providing annual data across a range of indicators, the Lancet Countdown will lead and communicate on health and climate change; demonstrate the health co-benefits of mitigation and adaptation; and monitor global progress in meeting the Paris Agreement.

The Lancet Countdown has the potential not only to improve the response to climate change, but to transform it. The Collaboration is therefore delighted to announce that Christiana Figueres will join as Chair of its High-Level Advisory Board. Much as she did with the Paris Agreement, Christiana Figueres will help guide the Lancet Countdown to maximise its impact and deliver on the promise of the Paris Agreement.

¹ United Nations, 2015, Paris Agreement

² Watts, N. et al, 2015, Health and climate change: policy responses to protect public health, *The Lancet*, Vol. 386, No. 10006, p.1861–1914

³ Watts, N. et al, 2016, *The Lancet Countdown: tracking progress on health and climate change*, *The Lancet*, Volume 389, No. 10074, p.1151–1164