

**Towards a Framework Convention on Global Health:
The Joint Action and Learning Initiative (JALI)
November 2010**

Despite enormous advances in science and medicine, much of the world's population continues to suffer and die from preventable disease. Health has become one of the starkest illustrations of global inequality: there are millions of avoidable deaths every year impacting on development, education, and life expectancy. To challenge this inequality and develop strategies to promote and fulfill the unrealized but not unrealizable human right to health, a global coalition of civil society and academia is collaborating on a *Joint Action and Learning Initiative on National and Global Responsibilities for Health (JALI)*.

JALI's Vision

The JALI's ultimate goal is to secure, through collaborative research and advocacy, a Framework Convention on Global Health (FCGH) – a global health treaty that would, for the first time, express a shared vision for realizing the human right to the highest attainable standard of health and enabling all people to have their essential health needs met. We envision a treaty that sets clear priorities, coordinates presently fragmented activities, ensures scalable and sustainable economic and human resources, clarifies national and international responsibilities, and creates accountability at all levels, including through monitoring, performance evaluation, and enforcement.

We believe that a campaign to establish a global health agreement with a strong foundation in the international right to health grows out of the last few decades of health activism, particularly the successes of the AIDS advocacy movement. An international global health agreement is the logical next step to follow the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and should be adopted by 2015. It would remain rooted in the UN Millennium Declaration that countries have an individual and “collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level.”

Why We Need the JALI and a Framework Convention on Global Health

The JALI recognizes and welcomes the unmistakable progress in global health over the past decade. But the level of health inequities between and within countries remains unconscionable. The number of people suffering avoidable death and disease is unnecessary and overwhelming. Today, a woman in sub-Saharan Africa is nearly 140 times more likely to die in childbirth during her lifetime than had she lived in a wealthy country, and her children's healthy life expectancy is 25 years lower.

In the twenty-first century, despite modern public health, our societies fail to meet the most fundamental human needs of much of the world's population: 884 million people lack access to clean water, 925 million go without adequate nutrition, 2.6 billion without basic sanitation. And one billion people are on track to die in this century from tobacco.

In short, the internationally accepted human right to health remains a hollow promise for large swathes of humanity. It is time to honor this right, to hold all states accountable for meeting their responsibilities to their own people, as well as to the world's most disadvantaged. The JALI aims to achieve a global health treaty that would, for the first time, make it possible to fulfill this vital human aspiration.

The JALI's Learning and Action Agenda

JALI is not a new movement, but an effort to give a more powerful voice to advocacy and research towards a common goal. Its ultimate objective is to persuade governments, the private sector, civil society, and communities of the need for a Framework Convention on Global Health. To achieve this, JALI will catalyze, co-ordinate, and utilize multiple streams of research, bringing together health movements and researchers to try to formulate answers to key unanswered questions on national and global health responsibilities, including four critical global health issues:

- ❖ What are the essential services and goods guaranteed to every human being under the human right to health?
- ❖ What is the responsibility that all states have for the health of their own populations?
- ❖ What is the responsibility of all countries to ensure the health of the world's population?
- ❖ What kind of global health governance is needed to ensure that all states live up to their mutual responsibilities?

Creating shared understandings on answers to these questions is necessary but not sufficient. JALI will also seek to work with movements for health and its many aspects, such as water and sanitation. With these movements it will engage in advocacy to build the political support required for governments to adopt, join, and implement a post-2015 global health treaty. It will promote debate and discussion about the norms and institutions we need and suggest or support the actions required to close the gaps in national and global health inequalities. We hope that consensus on norms that emerge through the JALI process will inform and empower community and civil society efforts to hold their own governments accountable. JALI will also promote solidarity with and publicize global health advocacy initiatives, encouraging our partners to engage in and support these efforts.

How JALI Will Function

Today, JALI is a small but growing alliance of civil society and academic institutions from the Global South and North. Tomorrow – with your engagement – we aim to help catalyze a global movement united behind the right to health, and joined by champions in government and the private sector who share our goals. We aim to learn – and act – collectively, seeking direction from people and movements whose communities and countries are the least healthy. We aim to learn from, and collaborate with, existing health movements, campaigns, and initiatives. We will seek partners to assist in research,

share their experiences, offer perspectives on the critical issues and on the contents and standards for a global health treaty, and advocate for the treaty.

A broad and inclusive process is imperative if we are to build support for a global health treaty crafted around the health needs and rights of people whose voices are traditionally least likely to be heard—an international agreement that empowers communities and civil society to hold governments to account for the well-being of their people.

The time is short, the stakes are high, and the challenges immense. Millions of lives could be bettered by this initiative. So success is vital – but only possible through a broad, motivated partnership that is led by those with the greatest need for swift and sustained progress towards having their right to health fulfilled. We ask you to join us.

To learn how you can get involved, please contact: jali@section27.org.za

For additional information about JALI, including a WHO Bulletin editorial and JALI's background paper to the World Health Report 2010, please see: <http://www.section27.org.za/2010/11/23/jali/>