



Public Health Association  
AUSTRALIA

13 November 2008

The Honourable Kevin Rudd MP  
Prime Minister  
Parliament House  
Canberra Australia

Dear Prime Minister,

A number of Australians, who are members of the Public Health Association of Australia, were participants in a conference held in London entitled "***Closing the Gap in a Generation***" which focused on the social determinants of health and global health equity (all presentations including the opening address by Prime Minister Gordon Brown are available at [www.csdhconference.org](http://www.csdhconference.org)). We believe there were some crucial messages from this conference that should be discussed at the forthcoming G20 or "Bretton Woods 2" conference and have undertaken to write to you to make these evident so you might consider ensuring they are raised in discussion.

We were all very impressed by the opening presentation by Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his obvious commitment to global health equity. We noted his emphasis on the need to strengthen, not weaken, our ambitions on health in the global response to the current financial crisis, and were strongly encouraged by his expression of moral obligation to find global solutions for global problems. We imagine that you might share similar perspectives to those of Prime Minister Brown.

We are sure you will agree that this commitment is not merely a test of our compassion, but also of our commitment to social justice. Compassion may lead us to minimise the damage to health arising from the crisis; but social justice, and a strengthening of our ambitions, requires us to go much further.

The London conference was called to enable detailed discussions on the report from the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health. This report clearly identifies a number of structural drivers in the global economy which have, and continue to, undermine health and health equity, particularly in the developing world. The current discussions around a "Bretton Woods 2" process offer us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to address these issues – and social justice demands that we seize this opportunity.

There was a strong sense among speakers and participants at the "Closing the Gap in a Generation" that the current review of the global financial system must go beyond responses to the immediate and most visible symptoms of the crisis to encompass a fundamental reorientation of the system to allow us to achieve our global objectives, including health, health equity, poverty and climate change. This was seen as requiring, not only a broad agenda, but a genuinely global and participatory process, including all countries

on an equal basis, and not only the developed countries and the larger and more prosperous developing countries represented on the G20.

The developing countries have suffered infinitely more from the failings of the international financial system for the last 30 years, through debt and financial crises and the effects of now discredited “structural adjustment” and health sector “reform” programmes, than the developed countries are now suffering from the current financial crisis. The adverse consequences for health and health equity are amply demonstrated in the reports of the CSDH and the Knowledge Networks it established.

These adverse effects have led to strong and repeated calls for major reforms to the system from a broad spectrum of civil society in the North and the South, from the “50 Years is Enough” campaign, initiated ahead of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bretton Woods conference in 1994, through to the more recent global “IMF: Shrink It or Sink It” campaign.

For the developed country governments now to use their dominant position in our current system of global economic governance to deal with their own (largely self-inflicted) problems, while ignoring the much greater and longer-standing grievances of the developing world and the profound and urgent global challenges of health, poverty and climate change, would be a inequitable. The proposals which emerged from such a process would have no legitimacy, or therefore credibility, seriously undermining their prospects for implementation and their effectiveness if implemented. The result would be to bring the whole system of global economic governance into still greater disrepute in the majority world, threatening political as well as economic stability at the global level.

This is a critical moment in human history. We are faced with a choice between the transformation of the global economic system, to bring it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and allow us to tackle the extraordinary global challenges we now face; or seeking to paper over the cracks of a profoundly dysfunctional system, and bequeathing a world of gross inequity, widespread poverty, disease and environmental catastrophe to our children and grandchildren.

You are exceptionally well placed to act. You have the privilege of representing Australia at the gathering of the G20 countries and exerting our influence in the global system of governance, you already have a strong reputation as a political leader who appreciates the international dynamics in our region. Nationally your government has lead the world by making a strong commitment to closing the gap between the health status of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians

Your experience and position gives you a unique opportunity – but also a unique responsibility - to make change happen. We therefore call on you, in the strongest possible terms, to use your position within both official and informal discussions of responses to the financial crisis, starting with this week’s meeting of G20 leaders:

1. to ensure that consideration is not limited to the immediate problems of the banking and financial system, but extends to the key global challenges of health, poverty and climate change, and the anachronistic and undemocratic structure of global governance which underlies the failure of the global community to deal with these issues effectively; and

2. to ensure that the “Bretton Woods 2” process itself is fully inclusive of all countries, on an equal basis, and reflects contemporary standards of democracy, transparency and accountability.

In this context, we draw your attention to one of the key findings of the CSDH report (p19):

“It is only through such a system of global governance, placing fairness in health at the heart of the development agenda and genuine equality of influence at the heart of its decision-making, that coherent attention to global health equity is possible.”

It seems self-evident that this applies as much to the “Bretton Woods 2” process as to the longer-term structures that may emerge from it.

We would also draw your attention to the joint statement of global civil society (signed by 1,723 organisations and individuals at the time of writing), which makes a similar call to global leaders as a whole (available at <http://www.choike.org/bw2/>).

We look forward to hearing of a favourable outcome from the G20 meeting, and stand ready to provide any support or assistance that we can as discussions proceed.

Yours sincerely,



**Michael Moore**  
CEO PHAA

Other signatories to this letter include:

**Professor Fran Baum**

Head of the Department of Public Health at Flinders  
Life Member PHAA and Commissioner on the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health & Global Co-Chair People’s Health Movement

**Professor Rob Moodie**

Chair of the Preventative Health Task Force  
Professor of Global Health, Nossal Institute for Global Health

**Professor Mike Daube**

President Public Health Association of Australia  
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