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IARC statement on the adoption of the new cancer resolution by the World Health Assembly

On the occasion of the adoption of the new cancer resolution by the Seventieth World Health Assembly, Dr Silvia Franceschi, Special Advisor on Noncommunicable Diseases to the Director of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), delivered the following statement on behalf of IARC.



The number of new cancer cases occurring worldwide every year is set to increase by 70% in just 20 years, with the greatest increases in parts of the world where cancer services are already under pressure. The spiralling costs of cancer treatment and care combined with this increase in the number of new patients present a major challenge, not least to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In this context, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), as the cancer agency of the World Health Organization (WHO), is encouraged by the great interest shown by Member States with regard to cancer control.

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The role of IARC is to promote international collaboration in cancer research and, by so doing, to provide the scientific evidence base which WHO can use to advise Member States on cancer control strategies. As Dr Chan remarked in her Opening Address to this World Health Assembly, “Scientific evidence is the bedrock of policy. Protect it.”

IARC’s strategy encompasses three main areas of activity in our overall focus on cancer research for cancer prevention.

The first is to describe the occurrence of cancer, including national and global estimates of incidence, prevalence, mortality, and survival, providing this information to Member States through our [Global Cancer Observatory](#) website. IARC not only collates cancer statistics but also works alongside colleagues within individual cancer registries to improve the quality and coverage of those registries, supported by a multipartner project entitled the Global Initiative for Cancer Registry Development ([GICR](#)).

The second area is to understand the causes of cancer. There are still many cancers for which major causes remain unknown. In addition, the causes of cancer are diverse and vary geographically. The tobacco epidemic is decreasing in some countries but still rampant in others. Overall, 15% of all cancers are due to chronic infections, but this proportion varies from 3% in North America to about 50% in sub-Saharan Africa. IARC works with national colleagues to study the remarkable variations in cancer patterns in different parts of the world as a way of obtaining fresh clues about causes. This is a first step to future prevention.

In this context, IARC is committed to working in cooperation and close coordination with WHO in relation to identification of cancer hazards and the conduct of cancer risk assessments in order to provide clear and consistent evidence-based advice to Member States.

The third area is to evaluate preventive interventions, including removing or reducing exposures and diagnosing cancer at an early stage. But research must go further, to study the factors which help or hinder the implementation of preventive strategies into national cancer control programmes, especially in low- and middle-income countries. It is important that cancer research does not cease with proof of principle but addresses all the relevant questions to enable application.

Across each of these areas and throughout its history, IARC has helped build national capacity in cancer research by working in close and equal partnership with colleagues in Member States. We will continue to do so.

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IARC already works in close cooperation with WHO at the three levels of WHO headquarters, regional offices, and country offices in many areas of activity. The proposed cancer resolution offers IARC further opportunity to collaborate closely with WHO, thus playing our part in ensuring the most up-to-date scientific evidence is available to inform cancer control measures in the coming decades. Thank you.