



Press release

EMBARGO UNTIL 12.00 noon (11.00 am GMT) Wednesday 14 November 2007

Press conference

“COPD: It's hard to speak up when you're struggling to breathe”

11.00-11.30 am, 14 November, Press conference room, European Parliament, Strasbourg (Briefing room LOW N –1.2) followed immediately by

Photo opportunity: *Professor William MacNee, Past President of the European Respiratory Society, Catherine Stihler MEP (Scotland PSE), Marianella Salapatas, Vice-President, European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients Associations (EFA), and patient (from Strasbourg).*

Health experts seek legislation to help Europeans breathe more easily

Strasbourg, Wednesday 14 November 2007 – Indoor air quality needs to be improved to reduce a leading cause of death in the European Union, a leading professor in respiratory medicine will tell a meeting to launch a declaration on COPD in the European Parliament today. (1)

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a mixture of chronic bronchitis and emphysema, which is often associated with other long-term conditions, such as hypertension and diabetes. (2)

“Few people have ever heard of COPD but it is ruining lives and forcing up to 300,000 Europeans to depend on portable oxygen tanks,” (2) says Prof. William MacNee, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom and a former past president of the European Respiratory Society.

“It is an under-recognised and under-diagnosed problem that is growing in Europe as populations age,” he says. The present death toll is 200,000-300,000 each year in the European Union. (3)

A recent 12-country study published in *The Lancet* showed that about one in four 52-60 year-olds in Salzburg were suffering from chronic obstructive respiratory disease (COPD). (4) Tobacco smoke remains the most important cause but passive smoking and other air pollutants are contributory factors. (5)

The European Respiratory Society, the European Lung Foundation and the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations hopes that by working with politicians,

greater attention will be drawn to the condition among both doctors and the public and to the need for more comprehensive implementation of clean indoor air policies.

The launch of the declaration at a press conference and lunch-time debate is hosted by Catherine Stihler (UK, PSE). She has prepared the written declaration on COPD in partnership with the European Respiratory Society, European Lung Foundation, and the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients Associations.

The declaration calls for prevention efforts, equal access to early treatment and research into the causes, prevalence and treatments for COPD. It also urges EU Member States to implement comprehensive smoke free policies and to develop smoking cessation strategies. It calls on the EU to publish a Green Paper on indoor air under the Environment and Health Action Plan. (6)

Ms Stihler is working closely with doctors' and patients' groups and to encourage MEPs to sign the declaration. The signature of a majority of MEPs will prompt a debate in the European Parliament, Council and Commission.

"By 2020, COPD will be the third-largest cause of death worldwide," says Ms Stihler. "It kills more people in Scotland than breast cancer, alcoholic liver disease, illegal drug use and transport accidents put together. The impact on lives and the economy is enormous. We must do our utmost to stop the spread of this chronically overlooked disease." (7)

Marianella Salapatias, Vice President of the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients Associations (EFA) sums up the current misery for patients. "They suffer agony due to shortness of breath, frustration from not knowing when they will get an attack nor what causes it, and discouragement that so little is happening on a scientific level to explain, cure or prevent exacerbations." EFA welcomes the declaration and hopes the initiative will lead to more comprehensive programmes, including better treatment and care. (8)

Following the launch, the declaration will be available to MEPs for signature. Ms Stihler's co-sponsors are Jerzy Buzek (Poland, EPP-ED), Paulo Casaca (Portugal, PSE), Avril Doyle (Ireland, PSE) and Gérard Onesta (France, Greens-EFA). (9)

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Notes to journalists

1. **Press conference** is at 11.00-11.30 am, 14 November in the Press conference room of the European Parliament, Strasbourg (Briefing room, LOW N -1.2) Documents will be available online at www.ersnet.org and www.efanet.org from 12.00 noon on 14 November 2007, which is World COPD Day.

2. **COPD:** The illness is a mixture of chronic bronchitis (inflammation and narrowing of the airways) and emphysema (weakening of the structure of the lung), and is often associated with other chronic diseases such as chronic heart failure, hypertension, and metabolic disorders, such as diabetes. COPD causes gradual restriction of airflow and consequent difficulty in breathing.

Because of this, shortness of breath, cough and sputum production are common symptoms in COPD. Although these symptoms can be dealt with, the weakening of the lungs caused by COPD is not fully reversible.

4. The Lancet, Vol. 370, No. 7589, pages 713-800, September 1-7, 2007

5. COPD does not only affect smokers. According to the Finnish National Prevention and Treatment Programme, the prevalence of COPD among non-smokers can be as high as 5%.

6. The European Parliament's report on the Environment and Health Action Plan (Feb 2005) stressed that the quality of air inside buildings cannot be improved without a wide-ranging approach that takes into account the many sources of pollution, and called on the Commission to draft guidelines specifically related to domestic pollution. In addition, the World Health Organization European region is currently working on establishing Indoor Air Quality Guidelines for Europe that could complement the already existing Air Quality Guidelines for Europe.

7. Productivity losses due to COPD amount to a total of 28.5 billion Euros annually in Europe. The total financial burden of lung disease in Europe amounts to nearly 102 billion Euros, a figure comparable to the annual gross domestic product (GDP) of the Republic of Ireland. COPD contributes to almost one-half of this figure, followed by asthma, pneumonia, lung cancer and TB.

8. For interviews with patients in other European countries, please contact Susanna Palkonen, European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients Associations (EFA), +32 4 76 373 923

9. A previous written declaration on COPD was signed by 120 MEPs.

The European Respiratory Society (ERS) is a not-for-profit, international medical organisation with over 8,000 members from 100 countries. It was founded in 1990 and is the largest society in Europe in its field. Its main objective is to promote respiratory health in Europe in order to alleviate suffering from respiratory diseases. This is accomplished by promoting basic epidemiological and clinical respiratory research, collecting and disseminating scientific information, organising congresses and conferences, producing scientific publications, supporting training and continuous education in respiratory medicine and collaborating with organisations representing patients.

The European Lung Foundation (ELF) is the public voice of the ERS and the only pan-European foundation dedicated to lung health. Its aim is to serve the European Community by sharing scientific expertise in respiratory medicine with the public. This is achieved by providing resource materials on lung diseases and its related risks, and by informing decision-makers in policy, business and media. The ELF draws together the leading European medical experts to provide patient information and raise public awareness about respiratory disease.

The European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients Association (EFA) is a European network of allergy, asthma and COPD patient organisations that was founded in 1991. EFA's mission is to draw together a European community of patient organisations which share responsibility for substantially reducing the frequency and severity of allergies, asthma and COPD, minimising their societal implications, improving health-related quality of life and ensuring full citizenship of people with these conditions, as well as pursuing equal health opportunities in the field of allergy and airways in Europe.