

## **New report from The Rockefeller Foundation-Lancet Commission on Planetary Health calls for action to ensure future health and environmental sustainability, showing that solutions are within reach**

### **A Pakistani is amongst the 15 member commission**

A new report released today by The Rockefeller Foundation-Lancet Commission on Planetary Health, calls for immediate, global action to protect the health of human civilization and the natural systems on which it depends. The report, *Safeguarding Human Health in the Anthropocene Epoch*, provides the first ever comprehensive examination of evidence showing how the health and well-being of future generations is being jeopardised by the unprecedented degradation of the planet's natural resources and ecological systems.

"This Commission aims to put the health of human civilizations, and their special relationship with the larger biosphere, at the centre of concerns for future planetary sustainability. Our civilization may seem strong and resilient, but history tells us that our societies are fragile and vulnerable. We hope to show how we can protect and strengthen all that we hold dear about our world," says Dr Richard Horton, Editor-in-Chief of *The Lancet* and one of the report authors.

The report was written by a Commission of 15 leading academics and policymakers from institutions in 8 countries, including Dr. Sania Nishtar, President Heartfile Pakistan. It demonstrates how human activity and development have pushed to near breaking point the boundaries of the natural systems that support and sustain human civilizations.

"The Rockefeller Foundation-Lancet Planetary Health Commission has issued a dire warning: human action is undermining the resilience of the earth's natural systems, and in so doing we are compromising our own resilience, along with our health and, frankly, our future," said Dr Judith Rodin, President of The Rockefeller Foundation. "We are in a symbiotic relationship with our planet, and we must start to value that in very real ways. Just as Foundation leaders 100 years ago took a holistic view and launched the field of public health, the Commission's report marks a paradigm shift for a new era of global public health, one that must be integrated with broader policy decisions."

The Commission warns that a rising population, unsustainable consumption and the over-use of natural resources will exacerbate these health challenges in the future. The world's poorest communities will be among those at greatest risk, as they live in areas that are most strongly affected and have greater sensitivity to disease and poor health.

"The health of people nations, and the planet are deeply interconnected, therefore the complex interdependencies in public policy implementation" said Dr. Sania Nishtar. "We need a new paradigm of governance to promote collaborative inter-sectorial action for solving 'sectorial' objectives. Intermediary agencies skilled to convene, instruments for asset allocations mappings; incentives for collaborative division of labor and metrics for the whole of the government performance assessment are needed now more than ever" she said.

"We are on the verge of triggering irreversible, global effects, ranging from ocean acidification to biodiversity loss," says Sir Andy Haines, Chair of the commission. "These environmental changes - which include, but extend far beyond climate change - threaten the gains in health that have been achieved over recent decades and increase the risks to health arising from major challenges as diverse as under-

nutrition and food insecurity, freshwater shortages, emerging infectious diseases, and extreme weather events.”

Solutions to these clear and potent dangers are within reach, say the Commission authors, but the world needs to take decisive, coordinated action to protect the environment and secure the health of future generations.

The Commission outlines a range of beneficial policies and actions that can be taken by governments, international organizations, researchers, health professionals and citizens that are good for both health and the environment. Examples include benefits from reduced air pollution, healthy diets with more fruit and vegetables, active transport (walking and cycling), reduced urban heat stress from green spaces, and increased resilience to coastal flooding from intact wetlands and mangroves. In addition, the report identifies some major gaps in evidence and the research that is needed.

Some of the recommendations include:

- Integrated social, economic and environmental policies: Policies and initiatives need to be designed to promote more efficient use of current resources to allow for the replenishment of natural systems. They should also spur innovation and make sustainable practices more mainstream, such as reducing waste and developing resilient cities.
- Better governance: Leaders need to take initiatives to reduce the risks to health and vital ecosystems, and implement policies to reduce subsidies that block sustainable practices, encourage behavioral change, incentivize the private sector, support research, and promote public discourse. To help ensure that Planetary Health is at the center of national policy, governments should give responsibility for monitoring trends and developing policies to a body that answers directly to the Head of State.
- Improved health systems: Environmental health needs must be integrated into health budgeting and purchasing. In addition, as environmental threats will be characterised by surprise and uncertainty, health systems must be designed for resilience, planning for potential risks and adapting quickly to meet challenges and restore services.
- A reorganization and expansion of our knowledge on Planetary Health: There are substantial gaps in knowledge that can be closed with the expansion of trans disciplinary research, improved understanding of the links between health and environmental change and potential adaptation strategies, building integrated surveillance systems and reporting on progress nationally and internationally.