

Statement from Women as a Major Group on Air pollution
Tuesday morning, May 1

As many delegations have pointed out, recent studies by the World Health Organization show that indoor air pollution from burning biomass fuels for household energy presents a major health threat for women and children in developing countries. This concern is well reflected in the Chair's draft text. We urge governments to go a step further and actually endorse the WHO target put forward at this meeting: 'By 2015, to reduce by half the number of people without access to modern cooking fuels and to make improved cooking technologies widely available.'

We would also like to point out that indoor air pollution caused by using traditional biomass fuels in smoky fires is due to lack of access by the poor to modern energy services. Indoor air pollution problems can be reduced through the use of chimneys and vents, improved kitchens and equipment arrangement, as well as better-quality wood supplies, wider availability of cleaner-burning 'improved' wood stoves and use of modern equipment, including solar cookers. However, the problems can only be solved when access to affordable, cleaner and sustainable modern energy sources is ensured.

Women in developing countries would benefit from government strategies to promote expanded access to affordable, cleaner and culturally appropriate technologies, including biogas digesters or solar cookers, as well as cleaner-burning and more efficient cooking fuels (such as LPG, kerosene, butane, natural gas, and locally and sustainably produced biofuels) and community reforestation programmes. Financing for investments in cooking energy programmes could be provided in the form of pro-poor financing mechanisms and smart subsidies, and should be included under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism and other voluntary funds.

For countries in transition, air pollution from industry and motor vehicles presents major health and environmental threats. Therefore we call for improved monitoring and quantitative assessments of these risks, regulations to control small particulates, and full implementation of the 'polluter pays' principle.