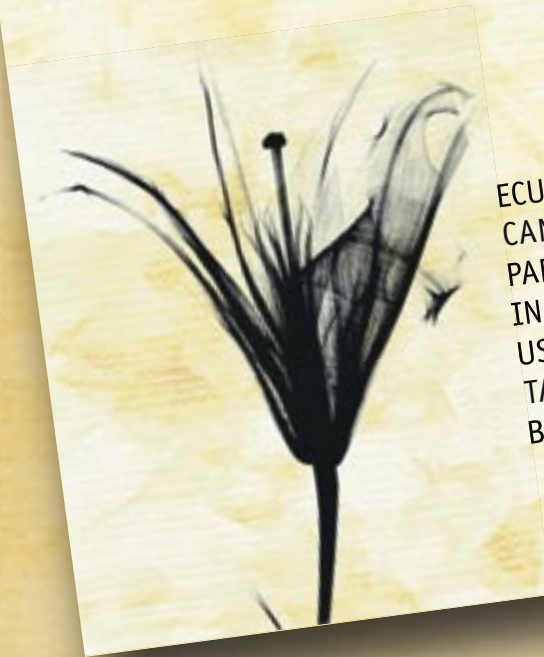


# The Cuenca Declaration

A global call to action to contain  
antibacterial resistance



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Cuenca, June 2008



From 9-10 June, 2008, 71 individuals from 22 countries, participated in an International Workshop, *“Containing antibacterial resistance: Reflecting, sharing and harmonising for coordinated action”* in Cuenca, Ecuador.

The participants came from ReAct (Action on Antibiotic Resistance) in Latin America and internationally, the Pan American Health Organisation, the Faculty of Medical Sciences of the University of Cuenca, Latin American and international Universities, Ministries of Public Health, Civil Society Organisations, technical cooperation agencies, scientific societies and regional and global networks which fight to guarantee the right to health.



The objectives of the meeting were to:

1. Analyse the problem of antibacterial resistance in Latin America from a holistic and ecosystem perspective, in the context of the right to health and the political and economic conditions of our peoples.
2. Establish guidelines for action and define strategies for integration between scientific and academic institutions, governmental, and social and community organisations to contain antibiotic resistance.





## **Antibacterial Resistance threatens our future**

We who participated in the workshop believe that antibiotic resistance is a seriously underestimated threat to public health. It has been generated by disrespectful use of a global public good and by ignoring the advice of those pioneers who discovered the value of antibiotics.



The inappropriate use of antibiotics in the world stems from a process of medicalisation of human health, of livestock, poultry, agriculture and aquaculture. Powerful uncontrolled promotion of antibiotics by the pharmaceutical industry and lack of enforcement of public policies on rational use of medicines provides strong incentives for medical prescription and self-medication, which deepens the problem.



This phenomenon occurs in the context of how many people live, without access to safe water, sanitation or to good nutrition, which predisposes these populations to suffering from infectious diseases.

Currently, antibiotic residues found in the soil, river water and oceans, is generating resistance in the microbiological environment. Untreatable bacterial infections have been reported and with increasing globalisation we could see an immeasurable problem in just a few years.





The global response has been too weak. Not enough attention has been paid to the prevention of bacterial diseases, to the necessity to stop the abuse of antibiotics, the need to develop new therapeutic options driven by public health needs, and to promote healthy environments.

In summary, the problem of antibiotic resistance is threatening our future. The current generation has the ethical obligation to reverse this process.



According to the vision of indigenous peoples, the problem is not the bacteria but the systematic destruction of mother earth and the cosmos by consumerist society, which has invaded and destroyed the sacred sites of different forms of life, including the world of bacteria.



Actions cannot be limited to fragmented interventions; actions required range from the commitment of governments and politicians to changes in social and individual behaviours. Co-ordinated action is necessary in all areas seeking to re-establish the health of the ecosystems.

## Call to action

Considering this situation we call on governments of all countries, international agencies and organisations, health professionals, civil society, universities and other educational institutions, multinational companies, including the food and agricultural industry, pharmaceutical industry, and other organised groups of civil society to respond in an integrated manner to re-establish the health of the ecosystem and implement activities to prevent and limit the spread of infections, to ensure the appropriate use of antibiotics and to facilitate the development of new treatments for emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases.



Specifically it is necessary to:

1. Evaluate the impact on public health and the environment of the inappropriate use of antibiotics in all sectors, whether in human medicine or in the food-producing sector (agriculture, aquaculture, livestock, poultry and other industries).
2. Inform different social groups (such as peasants, indigenous people, teachers, artists, communicators and workers) clearly about the magnitude of antibiotic resistance at local, regional and international levels, and about the contribution of different actors (the community, health professionals, food producers and others) to the generation of the problem. Develop a clear gender perspective in relation to this information.



3. Educate and update health workers, pharmacists, and communities, about the appropriate use and management of antibiotics, including their distribution, storage and disposal: through pre-graduate and postgraduate training and continuing education activities, and through the mass media. Use modes of communication adequate for the differences in location, gender and ethnic background.

4. Ensure timely access to health services, and access to effective antibiotics prescribed by health personnel qualified in the rational use of antibiotics as a substantial element in our peoples right to health, for the effective control of infectious diseases in humans and animals.



5. Optimise infection control activities within and outside hospitals, according to appropriate guidelines in order to decrease the spread of resistant bacteria.

6. Regulate the promotion, use and sale of antibiotics and establish instruments to monitor and control the pharmaceutical industry. Because of conflict of interest, information on the appropriate use of antibiotics must be provided by public institutions not the pharmaceutical industry.



7. Strengthen international organisations responsible for public health such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and the Andean Health Organisation (AHO) to ensure the regulation of the use and promotion of antibiotics.

8. Renew ethical commitments about the rational use of antibiotics between governments, producers, distributors and commercial sellers of medicines, according to the code of ethics of the WHO.

9. Protect and promote health to prevent infections that require the use of antibiotics.



10. Promote multisectoral, interdisciplinary, equitable, participatory and transcultural approaches to bacterial resistance considering the inherited wisdom of indigenous people.

11. Formulate a holistic approach and new perspectives to address the problem of antibiotic resistance seeking equity, harmony and respect between human beings, other forms of life and ecosystems, and avoiding consumption that damages the internal environment of the person, the environment of microorganisms and the cosmos.

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The views incorporated in this Declaration do not necessarily represent a consensus of all participants on every issue. They reflect, however, the most important areas covered by the discussion. It should furthermore be noted that participants expressed themselves in their personal capacities, and not in all cases on behalf of the organisations or governments which they represented.





*“It is not difficult to make microbes resistant to penicillin...*

*The time may come when penicillin can be bought by anyone in the shops. Then there is the danger that the ignorant man may easily underdose himself and by exposing his microbes to non-lethal quantities of the drug make them resistant.”*

*Alexander Fleming’s Nobel Prize Acceptance Lecture, 1945*



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