

## **Memorandum**

**To:** Dr. Margaret Chan  
Director-General  
World Health Organization

**From:** Mary Robinson and Francis Omaswa, Co-Chairs and  
Health Worker Migration Global Policy Advisory Council Members and  
Delegates of the Council Inter-Regional Meeting, 9-11 May in Madrid, Spain

**Re:** The WHO Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health  
Personnel: A Historic Opportunity for a Global Response to the Challenges  
Posed by Health Worker Migration

**Date:** May 15, 2010

We write to you today regarding a problem that the WHO has termed a crisis of epic proportions—that of severe imbalances in health worker density worldwide. A major contributor to this problem is health worker migration. We applaud the WHO for developing a significantly improved Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel. The Code can be an important guide for action at the global, regional, national, and local level. Adoption of the Code by the 63<sup>rd</sup> World Health Assembly would be a critical step to address the challenges posed by health worker migration. We urge you to do all you can to see that the Code is adopted.

For the first time, there is broad inter-regional consensus on the Code of Practice. Last week in Madrid, 54 participants from 32 countries came together for the Health Worker Migration Global Policy Advisory Council/Inter-Regional Dialogue. Chaired by Honorable Mary Robinson and Dr. Francis Omaswa, participants included representatives from WHO AFRO, WHO EURO, WHO PAHO, WHO EMRO and select non-governmental representatives. Every participant in that meeting expressed strong support for the Code.

More than forty years ago, in 1968, the issue of “brain drain” of health workers came before the UN General Assembly. Subsequent WHA resolutions have repeatedly called for a Global Code to guide ethical responses to the challenges we face from health worker migration. We now have a historic opportunity to act to join together as a global community to move the Global Code of Practice forward. We must not let this opportunity be squandered.