

Special session on moving forward on the water and sanitation agenda in the pan European region: the role of the Protocol on Water and Health in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health

14 November 2016

*Outline of intervention of Ranieri Guerra (MoH, Italy) on*

*Climate change and its impacts represent a major challenge in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in particular in relation to water, sanitation and health. How is Italy dealing with such challenges? How can the Protocol support and complement these efforts?*

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Chair, colleagues, authorities,

Italy has been monitoring climate changes and related health and environmental implications for several years. The impact of abrupt climatic events has challenged several of our fragile areas, especially where post-industrial waste is stored.

Ministries of health, environment, agriculture are currently working within a prime minister's cabinet established framework to forecast impacts and mitigate damages to the environment and communities of humans as well as of animals, as Italy has always been using a one health approach established at the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Chair, acute climate changes have severely impacted several natural disasters prone areas, such as those hit by earthquakes in the past decade. Heat waves challenge our elderly and children quality of life and life expectancy every year: our sentinel and surveillance systems provide us with clear quantitative evidence of the heat impact on our most fragile population segments. With the fastest ageing population in the world, it is obvious that we look at this situation with high concern.

At the same time, we are constantly monitoring the chronic changes that affect our coastal areas and our water sources. Italy is the equivalent of a large air-carrier in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, with several areas already suffering from water scarcity mainly in summer, when the tourists season is at its peak, especially in small islands that attract up to fifty times the resident population.

Climate changes are also orienting two additional critical issues, such as the re-emergence of previously endemic agents (with the occurrence of wild poliovirus in neighbouring countries, or an increased TB incidence in migrants), or the arrival of exotic communicable diseases, such as dengue, chikungunya, zika, crimea congo fever, west nile fever, blue tongue: they are either surrounding us or already getting into the country with severe damages already incurred (10% of our national blood reserve is wasted because of WNF contamination). Additionally, our vectors' population is increasing and becoming more dangerous, as arboviruses competent species, such as *Aedes albopictus*, have become very common. Implications are clear and protection strategies have been strengthened, but we are at obvious constant and increased risk. The second issue is population movements, with an increasingly large population being rescued at sea by our vessels. Migrants to Italy are now totalling close to half a million people, crossing the sea and searching for help and a better life. Less than 10% qualify as refugees, as they are mainly economic and climate

migrants, moving from areas of drought and desertification, where climate changes have already shown their destruction potential.

Italy recognizes that water is the most fragile segment in our ecosystem that needs to be carefully protected and managed now, in view of possible future further challenges. We are now watching closely water resources, water supply systems and wastewater treatments that are affected by extreme events (e.g., droughts, flooding), with increased hydrogeological risk, soil erosion, coastal zone flooding, modification of inland water, marine and mountain ecosystems, with the risk of losing biodiversity and challenging food security and safety (e.g. with an emerging risk of foodborne diseases).

Actions undertaken have significantly intensified now. Health impacts of climate changes analysis and mitigation are addressed by our national and regional prevention plans, that provide intensive training for professionals and educational campaigns for the public. For instance, a major multi-regional project "*disorders related to climate change, the environment and lifestyles with particular focus on vulnerable people*" has been funded by the MoH this year. Importantly, following the Paris Agreement in 2015 resulted from COP 21 and in compliance with Parma declaration, the MoH has included the issue as the health sector priority theme of the next G7, that will be chaired by Italy in 2017. In this respect we trust our G7 partners and the international community by and large will participate actively in identifying strategies and concrete actions leading to a global focus protecting what the Lancet Commission has recently called planetary health.

Coherently, water and related health issues are explicitly addressed by the *Italian guidelines on Water Safety Plans* (available on WHO-WSP web-portal) developed by the MoH and the National Institute of Health (ISS), including contributions by national and local environmental agencies and other stakeholders. Specific information for consumers are also published in the MoH national portal on drinking and bathing water.

The MoH is making use of Risk assessment/Risk management criteria (*i.e.* water safety plans and sanitation safety plans) – including climate changes adaptation strategies and water reuse – as the most effective approach to protect water quality and human health. To this end, Italy has contributed to the development of the Commission Directive (EU) 2015/1787, the ongoing national process of transposition of the directive through which WSPs are introduced as a mandatory task for water providers and a national authority for WSPs approval is created under the MoH.

Parallel actions driven by MoH and ISS focus on developing health criteria and methods for water reuse at European and national level. In a wider framework, adaptation strategies for water resources, water supply chain, sewerage and waste-water treatment are addressed by the Italian National Strategy for Climate Change Adaptation (SNAC) driven by the Ministry of Environment, with contributions by the MoH, ISS and other stakeholders.

Italy is also playing a significant role in sharing experience and contributing to international guidelines on adaptation of water systems to climate changes (e.g., the WHO-UNECE Guidance on Water Supply and Sanitation in Extreme Weather Events).

Details will be discussed today at the side event on “*Water scarcity and droughts*”.

We believe that collaborative work of countries impacted in different ways by climate changes is key in achieving the relevant SDGs (e.g., SDGs 6.3, 11.5, 13). The protocol is therefore to be seen not as a theoretical exercise, but as the fundamental tool enabling coordinated capacity building and normative update, when needed, driving us towards the prevention, mitigation and management of water scarcity and quality improvement, strengthening resilience of water systems, particularly in urban areas and fragile ecosystems.

Accordingly, may I propose Italy as a candidate co-leader of the protocol Programme area 7, in collaboration with our sister country Spain. To this end we also anticipate our proposal to organize and host an international workshop on water systems with WHO and UNECE. We are also considering a second conference on rising sea levels impact on metropolitan coastal areas to be possibly held during the 2017 G7 presidency.

Many thanks for your support and collaboration.

***Ranieri Guerra – Biographic note***

Ranieri Guerra is a physician, specialized in public health in Italy and the UK. He is currently the Director General of Prevention and Chief Medical Officer at the Italian Ministry of Health. He served as counsellor for life sciences at the Italian Embassy in the US, and as research director at the Italian National Institute of Health. He was also appointed director of health at the UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian Refugees. He practised in several areas of the world with different agencies and NGOs. His professional interests and experience range from emergency and rescue operations (especially in war thorn areas) to the design and implementation of health reforms in less developed and in transitional countries. He served also in the Technical Review Panel of the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria and conducted several missions with the EC, UN, WB in many ACP countries. He chaired a WHO Collaborating centre on human resources for health for more than a decade and trained several hundred professionals with innovative curricula, educational techniques and technologies, introducing post-graduate problem-based learning in the country, pioneering distance education for doctors, pharmacists, nurses and other health professionals within the National Health System and overseas. His scientific production focuses on community health and environmental-health, primary prevention, and interaction between the health service providers and the end users.