

Bill Martin, M.D.
National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences
PO Box 12233, MD: B2-07,
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709

Dear Dr. Martin:

The Fogarty International Center (FIC) enthusiastically supports the new initiative by the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) to prioritize global environmental health as part of its overall strategic plan, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the supporting documents. NIEHS' initiative is especially timely given the growing recognition of the epidemiological transition from infectious to chronic non-communicable diseases (NCD) in low- and middle-income countries, much of which may be attributable to environmental factors. This transition presents new possibilities for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to collectively expand our international NCD research portfolios, and I am convinced we can use these opportunities to answer many high priority research questions on the increasing burden of NCD in the United States.

The range of global environmental health research opportunities identified in the appendix are highly relevant and align well with FIC's current research agenda. As we reach the end of our strategic planning process here at FIC, we have ourselves recognized NCD as a critical priority for our future efforts, including the role of environmental and occupational exposures in complex disease processes. Many of the identified Environment-Disease research options reflect ongoing research training supported by the International Training and Research Program in Environmental and Occupational Health (ITREOH). Additionally, many of the research options in this document are directly relevant to disease conditions identified by the *Disease Control Priorities Project* as the most significant causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide. We are especially interested in the options pertaining to 1) Impacts of Indoor/Outdoor Air Pollution on Asthma, Acute Respiratory Infections, Cardiovascular diseases, and maternal/child health; 2) Arsenic and other contaminants in drinking water; and 3) neurological outcomes from exposures to PCBs/pesticides/metals.

Several FIC programs are uniquely positioned to support the proposed strategies for NIEHS' international research projects. For example, our Fogarty International Research Collaboration Award (FIRCA) provides a mechanism to add international components to existing NIH grants in practically every area of research funded by NIH. Our ITREOH program, which would not be possible without ongoing technical and financial support from NIEHS, is an institutional grant that provides a mechanism for training scientists from developing countries in environmental and occupational health research. Our Global Research Initiative Program for New Foreign Investigators (GRIP)

provides opportunities for NIH-trained foreign investigators to return to their home countries to enhance the scientific research infrastructure and stimulate research on high priority health issues that advance NIH global efforts. These and other FIC programs could all be expanded to support specific NIEHS' research priorities, train a new cadre of appropriately qualified researchers, develop capacity of foreign countries to conduct NIEHS' research priorities, and develop centers of research excellence in global environmental health. Additionally, the R21 grant mechanism used to support FIC's Brain Disorders in the Developing World, may be well suited for the NIEHS initiative, as it provides support to conduct pilot studies and to develop an application for more comprehensive R01 grants.

In summary, FIC strongly believes the NIEHS initiative is an important step in the right direction. We at FIC, including staff involved in developing our new strategic plan, look forward to exploring how we can most effectively work together with NIEHS on our collective strategic planning efforts. Please feel free to contact my staff or me at any time.

Sincerely,

Roger I. Glass, M.D., Ph.D.
Associate Director for International Research, NIH
Director, Fogarty International Center