

The Global Initiative for the Elimination of Avoidable Blindness

Ramachandra Pararajasegaram
FRCS FRCOphth
President
International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness
Grosvenor Hall
Bolnore Road, Haywards Heath
West Sussex, RH16 4BX, UK

The first of a series of articles on the Global Initiative appeared in Volume 11, Issue No. 25 of the Journal of Community Eye Health.

Bjorn Thylefors described this initiative as a strengthened and accelerated movement for prevention of avoidable blindness, particularly in the developing world, which is home to over two-thirds of those who have such visual disability. The initiative is a collaborative effort of the World Health Organization's Programme for the Prevention of Blindness and Deafness (PBD) and a group of International Non-



Governmental Organisations with the common goal of eliminating avoidable blindness by the year 2020, in partnership with committed member countries.

It needs to be acknowledged that despite a half century of efforts commencing with trachoma control activities, the burden of some forms of blindness and visual impairment continues unabated. This may mask the significant advances that have been made collectively by member countries, WHO and other UN agencies, International Non-Governmental Organisations and the private sector, towards the achievement of the goal. However, in spite of progress in science, public health and ophthalmology, blindness remains an important global public health problem.

Political Will, Professional Commitment, Public Awareness

It has been acknowledged that the necessary pre-requisites for a successful initiative against such a major public health problem, includes strong political will, serious professional commitment and a greater awareness among people of the far reaching developmental, social, economic and quality of life implications of needless blindness. Enhancing political, professional and public awareness and interest, would be the first interim goal of the Global Initiative.

To achieve these critical pre-requisites, the first phase of the Global Initiative will include activities to generate awareness

among policy makers, the professionals and the public of the magnitude of the blindness burden, at present and its projected escalation in the future. This process of information and sensitisation will take the form of a series of pre-launch activities, preceding phase two which will be a formal launch of the Global initiative.

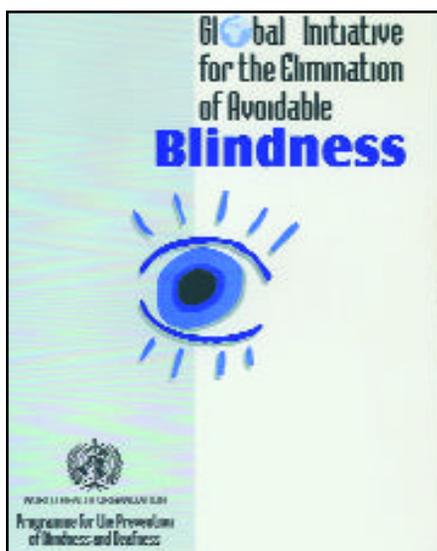
Phase 1 of the public relations aspect of the Initiative is well underway with the support of a number of Non-Governmental Organisations. The details of the pre-launch and the subsequent launch will unfold over the next few weeks. Future issues of Community Eye Health will provide readers with updated information.

In conclusion, the interim aim of the Global Initiative is to stimulate a groundswell of heartfelt concern and committed action at all levels, from the grassroots community to the highest national policy levels, and indeed internationally, to come to grips with the burgeoning burden of blindness. It will also heighten awareness of the problem of needless blindness in social, developmental, and economic terms and stress that resources, spent in eliminating avoidable blindness, will be a worthwhile investment.

Vision 2020 – The Right to Sight (Pre-launch)

The following organisations have joined in the campaign 'Vision 2020 – The Right to Sight' and agreed to contribute US\$10,000 to the pre-launch:

Al Noor Foundation, Asian Foundation for Prevention of Blindness, Christoffel Blindenmission e.V., Foundation Dark & Light, Fred Hollows Foundation, Helen Keller International, International Eye Foundation, Nadi Al Bassar, ORBIS International, Organisation pour la Prevention de la Cécité, Perkins School for the Blind, Seva Foundation, Sight Savers International, Association for Direct Support to Medical Projects in Developing Countries (SIMAVI), The Lighthouse Inc, and the World Blind Union.



Global Initiative for the Elimination of Avoidable Blindness

This important new document outlines objectives, strategies, indicators and targets for service delivery of eye care, with reference to the most amenable causes of avoidable blindness at the present time. These are Cataract, Trachoma, Onchocerciasis, Childhood Blindness, Refractive Errors and Low Vision. Advice is also given on strategies for the control of other significant causes of blindness. Information on Human Resource Development and Infrastructure and Appropriate Technology is provided. This document will be particularly relevant to programme planners, public health officials, community-oriented eye care professionals and those governmental and non-governmental organisations responsible for developing prevention of blindness programmes.

Copies are available free of charge from both the WHO Programme for the Prevention of Blindness and Deafness and the International Resource Centre. Please write to:

Programme for the Prevention of Blindness and Deafness
World Health Organization
 1211-Geneva 27
 Switzerland

International Resource Centre
International Centre for Eye Health
 11-43 Bath St., London EC1V 9EL
 United Kingdom