

## Community Eye Health

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Supporting VISION 2020:  
The Right to Sight



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# The Resolution of the World Health Assembly on the Elimination of Avoidable Blindness

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The word 'resolution', is a derivative of the French word, 'soluere', meaning 'to solve', and is defined by The Oxford Dictionary as:

'The formal expression of opinion or intention by a legislative body or public meeting'.

The Resolution on the Elimination of Avoidable Blindness adopted by the Fifty-sixth World Health Assembly meeting in Geneva on the 28 May 2003, therefore, has special significance.

The Resolution was adopted by the member states unanimously and testifies first and foremost to the fact that the Right to Sight is not a contentious issue.

The Resolution is a statement of intent based on an assessment of the prevailing situations with regard to avoidable blindness and its consequences. The Resolution first urges member states to take note of the magnitude, and far reaching consequences of needless blindness and visual impairment in their own countries, generally among the poorest of their poor citizens. Next, it urges a course of action for the World Health Organization, to be carried out in collaboration with her various partners. This takes the form of supportive actions to member states, to make their stated intent a reality.

Thus, there is political awareness and commitment, The Resolution also calls for enhanced support from WHO, the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, its constituent members, including professional bodies, civil society organisations and the private sector – to assist member states. This provides a new opportunity to stem the rising tide of avoidable blindness through the synergy derived from working in Partnership. This Partnership is seen as an unique strength of the Global Initiative. The international aid community emphasises national capacity development as a critical factor in poverty

alleviation. This is equally applicable to VISION 2020. Such an effort at capacity development, will promote self-reliance and increasing sustainability.

The stated objective of VISION 2020: The Right to Sight is the global elimination of avoidable blindness by the year 2020. In the process of achieving this objective it is hoped that each member state will develop a sustainable, comprehensive eye care system as an integral part of the national health system. This will ensure that avoidable blindness is eliminated as a public health problem in all countries, and within any community.

The Resolution deals with plans of action, implementation, targets, monitoring and evaluation. These are all important elements as we move the Global Initiative forward.

However, plans in themselves mean little unless these are implemented. Enhanced implementation will require better utilisation of existing resources, in the first instance, and new additional resources where appropriate. Acquisition of new resources must go hand in hand with learning how to deploy these resources to accomplish often complex tasks. Implementation without monitoring what is being done, and evaluating their outcomes, is to live in the complacent world of 'presumed merit'.

The WHA Resolution is a wake-up call, based on the realisation of a major escalating public health crisis in the field of eye health – a crisis with far reaching socio-economic, developmental and quality of life implications. It is also a crisis against which we can act, using the knowledge, skills, and cost effective interventions already at our disposal.

The Global Initiative provides us all with an opportunity to translate our resolve and plans, into action. History will prove whether we seized and acted on that opportunity to ensure the right to sight for all persons.

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