



Networks

The International People's Health Council

“The struggle for health is a struggle for liberation from poverty, hunger and unfair socio-economic structures”

IPHC, 1991

The International People's Health Council (IPHC) was established in 1991 as a worldwide coalition of people's health initiatives and socially progressive groups and movements committed to working for the health and rights of disadvantaged people – and ultimately of all people.

The vision of the IPHC is to advance toward 'Health for All', viewing health in the broad sense of physical, mental, social, economic and environmental well being.

The inaugural meeting in Nicaragua in December 1991 was planned with a view to exploring concepts of health in “societies in transition”, where ‘transition’ was used in a positive sense, in terms of change toward healthier, people empowering social structures. The participants were mostly from countries in socio-political turmoil, if not always transition. All were leaders in community health work among disadvantaged groups, many in the struggle for liberation or for far reaching social and political (structural) change. They were from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, the Dominican Republic, the USA, India, Bangladesh, the West Bank and South Africa.

At the end of the meeting a public statement was issued, announcing the name of the newly formed IPHC, its proposed structure and objectives.

IPHC Objective

To foster among local, national and international agencies the formulation of economic and health policies that respect equity and the right to health, with an emphasis on primary health care, community-based health and health as a broad crosscutting issue.1

The second international gathering was held in Palestine in February 1995 around the theme of ‘The concept of health under national democratic struggle’². The third gathering in Cape Town in January 1997 was co-sponsored by IPHC, the National Progressive Primary Health Care Network (of South Africa) and the South African Health and Social Services Organisation. The proceedings of this conference were published under the title, ‘Lighten the burden of third world health: the new world order: a challenge to health for all by the year 2000’³.

The networks and connections from which IPHC participants drew their experiences and into which they, in turn, fed IPHC analyses was impressive. It was well placed to strengthen the link between political analysis and grassroots work and to extend the network's efforts to promote the political understanding of health as a global issue

The planning and management of the first People's Health Assembly out of which emerged the People's Health Movement was a crucial achievement towards which the IPHC made a very significant contribution.

As PHM evolved, IPHC, as a loose network of activists, continued to play an important role in steering PHM, in organizing subsequent PHAs and in sustaining the work of PHM at the local, regional and global levels. However, many of the objectives which IPHC had set itself in the early years are now being carried by PHM including promoting a structural analysis of health politics, promoting the importance of grass roots mobilization and building global solidarity.

As a consequence of the commitment to PHM by IPHC activists and the success of PHM as a growing global movement, activism under the IPHC banner subsided in the new millennium.

IPHC was one of the founding networks of PHM since 2000 and as such has had a representative on the PHM Steering Council. However, with the PHM governance reforms currently being put in place IPHC has been required to review its position vis a vis PHM.

In terms of the future of IPHC a range of scenarios are possible, ranging from revitalization with a focus on political and economic analysis of global health issues; through hibernation; to disbandment. One practical consideration which is worth some weight is that IPHC has legal status as a Stichting registered in the Netherlands.

Pending finalization of current discussions regarding the future of IPHC it would be appropriate for the network to be included in the PHM college of networks (however named) but not to put forward a person for election to the Steering Council.

There should be no doubt that IPHC as an organization and as a loose network of activists is fully supportive of PHM and the direction that PHM is presently taking including the governance reform.

References

1. International People's Health Council. Health care in societies in transition: a report on a small international meeting held in Managua, Nicaragua, December 4-9, 1991. Palo Alto, Hesperian Foundation, 1992.
2. International People's Health Council. The concept of health under national democratic struggle:. Jerusalem, Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, 1995.
3. International People's Health Council. Lighten the burden of third world health: the new world order: a challenge to health for all by the year 2000. Durban, Health Systems Trust, 1997.