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# Foreword

**E**nergy is essential to meet our most basic needs: cooking, boiling water, lighting and heating. It is also a prerequisite for good health – a reality that has been largely ignored by the world community.

More than three billion people still burn wood, dung, coal and other traditional fuels inside their homes. The resulting indoor air pollution is responsible for more than 1.5 million deaths a year – mostly of young children and their mothers. Millions more suffer every day with difficulty in breathing, stinging eyes and chronic respiratory disease. Moreover, indoor air pollution and inefficient household energy practices are a significant obstacle to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

*Fuel for life*, food for thought. With this publication we draw attention to a serious neglected public health problem. Effective solutions exist and the economic case for taking practical solutions to scale is just as strong as the humanitarian case. Making cleaner fuels and improved stoves available to millions of poor people in developing countries will reduce child mortality and improve women's health. In addition to the health gains, household energy programmes can help lift families out of poverty and accelerate development progress.

We hope that *Fuel for life* will inspire and prompt vigorous action to close the household energy gap.



Dr LEE Jong-wook  
Director-General  
World Health Organization



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