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There is a battle raging globally in which countries around the world are suffering many casualties. It is being fought right here in North America.

In North America this year more than 313,000 deaths will be attributable to diabetes—over 231,000 in the US alone.¹ The US and Mexico are among the 10 countries in the world with the highest number of diabetes patients.¹ If no action is taken, we will have an even bigger problem on our hands in the future. The International Diabetes Federation's (IDF) *Diabetes Atlas* predicts that half a billion people will have diabetes by 2030.

The pandemic is not only causing large-scale death and disability, but is also a major barrier to development in low- and middle-income countries. Diabetes, together with other non-communicable diseases (NCDs), imposes heavy costs on national healthcare systems and economies, affecting breadwinners in families and plunging entire communities into poverty. Again, without action, this socioeconomic burden will only worsen. For so many people with diabetes, insulin is their oxygen. They need it to survive. Despite this, the life-saving drug—discovered nearly 90 years ago—is inaccessible to them.

When fighting such a global epidemic, partnerships are crucial. Governments alone cannot solve a global challenge of this magnitude; it will take a concerted effort involving civil society, the research community, international agencies, and industry. Prevention especially will require broad dialogue across all sectors—including health, food and agriculture, urban design, and transport—as well as radical rethinking of how we live and our concepts of 'development', progress, and what constitutes a 'good life'. Partnerships and forums involving diverse groups are the only way we can take action and have the necessary global and multisectoral conversations.

However, there has been encouraging news. On May 13 this year, United Nations (UN) member states unanimously voted in favor of a high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly on NCDs to be held in September 2011. A major campaign for this summit was led by the NCD Alliance, comprising IDF, the World Heart Federation, the International Union Against Cancer, and the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease. The summit will take action on NCDs to a new level, raising the profile of these diseases that have been neglected for too long, mobilizing the international community, securing commitments from heads of state, and sending a clear message to donors and funders on the importance of tackling NCDs.

The huge job ahead of us remains in translating this opportunity into real change for people with diabetes and those at risk. Although diabetes and NCDs form 60% of the burden of disease in low- and middle-income countries, they receive less than 1% of international aid funding for health.² This has to change. We must ensure that in five years' time, we are able to look back and say that people worldwide have better lives because of what we achieved this year and next. ■

1. International Diabetes Federation, *IDF Diabetes Atlas*, 4th edn. Brussels, Belgium: International Diabetes Federation, 2009.

2. World Health Organization, Available at: www.who.it/hcdnet/en/ (accessed September 30, 2010).