

# HEALTH CHALLENGES FOR THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

Tikki Pang,

The world is indeed shrinking as the inevitable march of globalisation, rapid travel and the revolution in communications technology obliterates national boundaries. In health, the “shrinking” world is, unfortunately, accompanied by “growing” issues of increased disease burden and inequity in health status, especially between industrialised and developing countries. The very forces that promote globalisation have helped to spread disease and widen the knowledge and information gap between rich and poor countries. A clear example is the ongoing revolution in genomics and the life sciences which is resulting in unprecedented scientific advances with tremendous potential to improve health. At the same time, the reality is that much of the knowledge is produced and owned by the industrialised countries, and much of the resulting advances will be unaffordable to the poor living in the Third World. Consequently, the momentum driving the genomics revolution is primarily market-driven and knowledge is not being applied to diseases of the developing world, thus threatening to create a genomics divide between those who have and those who need. The challenges for the developing countries are myriad and complex and include improving the delivery of health care through better health systems, and strengthening the scientific and research infrastructure to ensure that advances in knowledge are applied to their own health problems. The World Health Organization, together with other international bodies and the global health community, have a key role to play in helping developing countries tackle these challenges by promoting the development of creative, innovative and equitable partnerships.