

## European Lung Foundation Award 2009



Mr Yvo de Boer

The European Lung Foundation (ELF) Award is presented annually to an individual who has made a major contribution to the service of human health. Recipients are selected because their actions have had a significant impact on politicians, patients and the general public, as well as on the medical community.

In 2009, the ELF is proud to present this award to Mr Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The award is being given in recognition of his efforts to encourage industrialised countries to commit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and therefore reduce the impact of climate change on respiratory health.

Climate change is often viewed as a purely environmental issue. However, it has serious implications for human health, with one of the main organs affected being the lungs.

The extent to which climate change may affect the respiratory system is not fully known; however, researchers can predict a dramatic impact on patients with conditions such as:

- Asthma;
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD);
- Rhinosinusitis;
- Respiratory tract infections.

The impact of climate change on patients with lung diseases will vary depending on: how much global temperatures rise in relation to their current level; the risk level for excessive rainfall and flooding; and the impact of those changes on other factors relevant to health, such as

air pollution, allergens and moulds. Planning for the future is vital.

Since 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that failure to reduce human-made climate change could have catastrophic effects on life. There is clear evidence that the global temperature is increasing, and it may increase by 4°C by 2100 unless action is taken.

Mr de Boer, the chief climate change negotiator for the United Nations (UN), has been involved in climate change policies since 1994. He has identified the need to establish measurable actions for developing countries and to help them adapt to the impact that climate change may have on people's lives. His work has focused mainly on climate change negotiations both before and after the Kyoto protocol was launched.

The goal of the Kyoto protocol, an international environmental treaty produced by the UN, is to stabilise the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere at a level that prevents climate change. The 184 countries that signed the treaty are legally obliged to reduce their output of carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and sulfur hexafluoride.

The Kyoto protocol, which came into force on February 16, 2005, is only a minor step towards addressing the issue of climate change, but it represents an international framework in which to work towards solving the problem.

In preparation for the UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen in December 2009, Mr de Boer hopes to:

- Establish how much the industrialised countries, are willing to cut emissions;
- Establish how much major developing countries such as China and India, are willing to limit the growth of their emissions;
- Help developing countries reduce their emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change;
- Determine how these efforts will be financed and how the funds will be managed.

Mr de Boer has earned the ELF Award 2009 as a result of his consistent commitment towards reducing the problem of global climate change and his endeavours to continue his vital work in future years.