

Iceland, June 15th, 2015

Excellency, Mr. Ban Ki-moon:
United Nations Secretary-General
UN Headquarters
First Avenue at 46th Street
New York, NY 10017
USA
Email: sgcentral@un.org

Excellency, Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

With this letter, the Icelandic nation and institutes in Iceland focused on the nervous system are answering your petition for the United Nations' new sustainable development goals which will be adopted in September of this year. The Icelandic nation appreciates your initiative to call for proposals for new development goals from the grassroots and nations of the world.

It is the hope of the Icelandic nation that the UN's response will be a positive one to Iceland's request to add a new development goal that relates to promoting medical research on the nervous system, which will ultimately lead to a cure for neurological diseases and treatment for damage to the nervous system. Our mission is to find a cure for all diseases of and damages to the nervous system's two components: the central nervous system and the peripheral nervous system. The main reason it has been difficult to find a cure for spinal cord injuries and brain damage is that the scientific community has a limited understanding of the nervous system's functionality. It is a worthy task for a small nation to use their influence to raise awareness and action in this field.

For many years, Iceland has supported and spoken for those with spinal cord injuries. Much has been achieved, such as Nordic co-operation on the matter (Attachment 1), an international database on spinal cord injury (Attachment 2), and a recent resolution passed in the Icelandic Parliament (Attachment 3).

The United Nations has already received a letter from the Institute of Spinal Cord Injury of Iceland (Attachment 4) and the Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations, dated in November (Attachment 5), stating that enhanced research on the nervous system will be one of the five focal points of Iceland's contribution to the next sustainable developmental goals. Since then, the Permanent Mission of Iceland to the UN has attempted to provide support for the issue at the level of the United Nations, with limited success.

In May 2014 the Icelandic Parliament passed a resolution on the measures to support medical actions to find cure for spinal cord injuries. The resolution of Parliament is focused on two main elements. The first is for a Nordic cooperation concerning coordinated research on the spinal cord, which is now carried out under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Second, it is stated that the Icelandic government supports adding a new developmental goal directed to the improvement of research and

cures of illnesses and damage to the nervous system. With this resolution, the Icelandic government has agreed to speak internationally for the nervous system.

It is unique that a single parliament should take the political decision to speak at an international level in favor of one organ system, the nervous system, about which little is known and no cure for illnesses related to it has been found. It is the hope of the Icelandic people that the voice of the Icelandic Parliament, the voice of institutes focused on the nervous system in Iceland, and the Icelandic people will be heard at the United Nations.

The stakes are high, socially, ethically, and economically; according to the World Health Organization (WHO), it is estimated that more than 1 billion people worldwide suffer from illnesses of the central nervous system. No single system creates more disability than the nervous system. Beside injuries of the spinal cord and brain, there are number of other neurological and mental illnesses such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, epilepsy, ALS/MND, stroke, depression, and dementia. According to WHO, incidences are growing, and this calls for an urgent action to improve medical research in this field.

With the efforts of the United Nations and the support of the international community, a cure could become a reality. No other contribution is greater for the hundreds of millions of people who now suffer around the world, as well as those who will be affected in the future, than a better understanding of the activity of the nervous system. It would lead to progress in treatment and healing, reduce mental and physical disabilities in the world, and lighten the burden of the chronically ill, their families, and societies, reflecting what you stated in your report, *The Road to Dignity by 2030*, concerning things that need to be done.

In your report, *The Road to Dignity by 2030*, the enormous goodwill and respect you carry for the welfare and future of mankind shines through. Everyone, no matter where in the social ladder they stand, should have the opportunity to carry their heads high. It is extremely vital (Chapter 70, Attachment 5), as you point out concerning the next sustainable development goals, that chronic illnesses, such as mental illness and damage to the nervous system along with traffic accidents, have to be outlined. Few enjoy equally deprived human rights and the respect of fellow citizens and society than people living with impaired mental health, paralysis, or other disabilities in their body. With your beautiful ideals, you open the way for Iceland to ensure the members of the United Nations join forces and associations to implement a jointly launched global effort to increase understanding of the function of the nervous system.

The Icelandic people supports your and the Icelandic government's vision for a better world for all through the mission to find a cure for illnesses and injury in the nervous system. The nation is aware that 17 development goals have already been proposed, as have 169 indicators. The nation is also aware that there is no suggestion in these indicators regarding an enhanced understanding of the nervous system. Therefore, the Icelandic nation pleads with you to recommend to the representatives of United Nations member states that they add an 18th independent developmental goal focusing solely on improving the understanding of the nervous system, which will hopefully lead to a cure to related diseases and damage.

The Icelandic nation, therefore, proposes the following:

1. "Promote research and understanding of the nervous system" be accepted as a development goal at the UN in September 2015.

2. The United Nations member states agree to contribute a certain amount of funding each year until 2030. The money should be used to establish an international working group of neurological researchers from recognized universities around the world. The challenge is for the international neuroscience division to work together to map the nervous system, assess the situation, establish cooperation, and provide a substantial grant in order to achieve understanding of the overall function of the nervous system.

Proposed measures to improve research on the nervous system:

Goal 18: Promote Research on the Nervous System - Measures to find a cure for disease and damage to the nervous system.

18.1. By 2030, halve the number of people paralyzed and suffering from neurological injuries and illnesses.

18.2 By 2020, promote and fund world-class scientific research and clinical trials to improve the understanding of the nervous system. Increase international cooperation on neurological research. Finishing the mapping of the nervous system and its functionality.

18.3 By 2030, substantially increase the number of people who suffer from mental illnesses, neurodegenerative illnesses such as Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, and epilepsy, damage to the nervous system such as spinal cord and brain damage from accidents, to receive effective treatment.

With gratitude and a hope for a positive result,

The Institute of Spinal Cord Injury of Iceland
Association of Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation
MS Institute of Iceland
MND Association of Iceland
Leaf – Icelandic Epilepsy Association
Health of the brain Association
The Icelandic Mental Health Alliance
The Icelandic Parkinson's Disease Association

Attachments:

1. Nordic Cooperation, <http://www.norden.org/is/nordurlandarad/thingmal/a-1524-velferd/14-2011>
2. International database on spinal cord injury, <http://www.sci-therapies.info>
3. Parliamentary Resolution, <http://www.althingi.is/altext/143/s/1243.html> [Icelandic]. For English version see Attachment 4.
4. Letter from the Institute of Spinal Cord Injury Iceland to the United Nations dated November 2014
5. Letter from the Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations dated November 2014
6. Chapter 70 in the report: The Road to Dignity by 2030