

## MEDIA DISTRIBUTION

### ICEE WEBSITE RELEASE

#### WORLD CONGRESS ON REFRACTIVE ERROR AND SERVICE DEVELOPMENT OPENS – 300 MILLION AVOIDABLY BLIND COULD BE TREATED BY 2020

Durban, South Africa, Wednesday 14 March, 2007: At the opening day of the World Congress for Refractive Error (WCRE), more than 650 delegates heard that the problem of refractive error facing the world today may be of a far greater magnitude than the 300 million reported.

Head of the International Association for Prevention of Blindness, Dr Nag Rao said the true number may be more than 500 million.

The outcomes of WCRE are certain to have implications for international public health. Congress organizers, the International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE), expect the congress will lead to significant reduction in the economic burden of refractive error.

WHO estimates the annual cost of uncorrected refractive error will be \$US110 billion per annum by the year 2020.

Delegates heard while WHO estimates 153 million are effected by blindness and impaired vision, that could be rectified with an eye examination and the right pair glasses, the number does not include those affected later in life by presbyopia, a major global health concern. In developing countries, presbyopia affecting those over the age of 45 is more likely to cause health problems, reduced life expectancy and ability to work.

Speaking during the morning session, Professor Brien Holden, Executive Chair of ICEE, said "the cost to deliver eyecare solutions to eliminate avoidable blindness by 2020 is thought to be as little as \$US1billion".

WHO estimates the global economic impact of visual impairment on the world today is currently 42 billion per annum.

Attending the congress are representatives of World Health Organisation (WHO), the peak body on avoidable blindness; International Association for the Prevention of Blindness, World Council Optometry, International NGO planners, professional associations and leading clinical and public health scientists.

ICEE would like to thank

Our Supporters



Platinum Sponsor



Gold Sponsor



International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE) Web: [www.icee.org](http://www.icee.org)

Africa Office: 272 Umbilo Road, Durban 4001 South Africa Tel/Fax: +27 31 202 3811 Email: [icee@icee.africa.co.za](mailto:icee@icee.africa.co.za)

Global Office: Level 4, North Wing, Rupert Myers Building, UNSW Sydney NSW 2052 Australia Tel: +61 2 9385 7435 Fax: +61 2 9385 7436 Email: [icee@icee.org](mailto:icee@icee.org) ABN: 86 081 872 586

## MEDIA DISTRIBUTION

Speaking on behalf of the World Council of Optometry, Ron Fyfe said “the magnitude of the problem is staggering – and its impact profound. The burden of refractive error touches every man, woman and child. Whether it is an adult who cannot work or a child who cannot read ... the burden falls up on the individual, family, communities, countries and world. Ultimately, everyone is affected by the prevalence of uncorrected refractive error, either directly or indirectly.”

“Development of the Durban Declaration – an agreement that will identify the priorities and strategy to reduce the global burden of refractive error and presbyopia – is a monumental task” he added.

Welcoming the delegates, Chair of the World Congress for Refractive Error and Service Development, Professor Kovin Naidoo said, “We are here to share our experience ... this congress services as the platform for further development in a long journey.”

Speaking on behalf of WHO, Dr Pararajesegaram said blindness, as previously acknowledged by WHO, has been globally reduced. However, he noted, blindness due to refractive error is a problem that can be corrected with eyecare screening and the correct glasses, has only relatively recently been identified but is now considered a primary challenge.

WHO acknowledges that 161 million today are visually disabled. Another 153 million suffer from uncorrected refractive effort; a total of 314 million visually disabled.

Dr Pararajesegaram encouraged the delegates by remarking, while is it is possible to reduce rapidly avoidable blindness, by 2020, he reminded delegates that “history will judge us by our collective action not our combined intentions.

For more information on the congress please visit our website on [www.icee2007.org.za](http://www.icee2007.org.za) . If you are interested interview or more information please contact: EMAIL: [s.connell@ier.org.au](mailto:s.connell@ier.org.au)  
CELL: + 439 600 312 WEB: [www.icee.org](http://www.icee.org) for images, background and more news.

ICEE would like to thank

Our Supporters



Platinum Sponsor



Gold Sponsor



International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE) Web: [www.icee.org](http://www.icee.org)

Africa Office: 272 Umbilo Road, Durban 4001 South Africa Tel/Fax: +27 31 202 3811 Email: [icee@icee.africa.co.za](mailto:icee@icee.africa.co.za)

Global Office: Level 4, North Wing, Rupert Myers Building, UNSW Sydney NSW 2052 Australia Tel: +61 2 9385 7435 Fax: +61 2 9385 7436 Email: [icee@icee.org](mailto:icee@icee.org) ABN: 86 081 872 586