Multidrug-resistant strains of tuberculosis have already cost cities like New York and countries like Russia hundreds of lives and more than $1 billion each, and these strains will continue to emerge unless countries act quickly to strengthen their control over the disease, the World Health Organization says.

A new report from WHO and the International Union against TB and Lung Disease indicates that resistance to at least 1 TB drug has increased by 50% in both Denmark and Germany since 1996, and doubled in New Zealand. In all 3 countries, foreign-born TB patients are nearly twice as likely as native-born patients to be harbouring a drug-resistant strain.

"Improved screening of immigrants will not solve this problem," said Dr. Arata Kochi, director of the Stop TB Initiative. "The only safeguard for wealthy countries is to help countries with poorly functioning TB-control programs to fix the problem immediately by helping them strengthen their programs."

To this end, 20 countries attending the Ministerial Conference on TB and Sustainable Development, held in Amsterdam Mar. 24, declared that global access to effective TB treatment is a human right and a government’s responsibility. This means that countries must provide anti-TB drugs, unhindered access to TB treatment, effective means of delivering treatment and affordable medicine for peo-