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DR. CARLO URBANI OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION DIES OF SARS

Geneva -- Dr. Carlo Urbani, an expert on communicable diseases, died today of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Dr. Urbani worked in public health programmes in Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam. He was based in Hanoi, Viet Nam. Dr. Urbani was 46.

Dr. Urbani was the first World Health Organization (WHO) officer to identify the outbreak of this new disease, in an American businessman who had been admitted to a hospital in Hanoi. Because of his early detection of SARS, global surveillance was heightened and many new cases have been identified and isolated before they infected hospital staff. In Hanoi, the SARS outbreak appears to be coming under control.

"Carlo was a wonderful human being and we are all devastated," said Pascale Brudon, the WHO Representative in Viet Nam. "He was very much a doctor, his first goal was to help people. Carlo was the one who very quickly saw that this was something very strange. When people became very concerned in the hospital, he was there every day, collecting samples, talking to the staff and strengthening infection control procedures."

Dr. Urbani was married and the father of three children.

Dr. Urbani received his medical degree from the University of Ancona, Italy, and did post-graduate work in malaria and medical parasitology. He was an expert in the parasitic diseases of schoolchildren. He was also a president of Médecins Sans Frontières-Italy.

"Carlo Urbani's death saddens us all deeply at WHO," said Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, WHO's Director-General. "His life reminds us again of our true work in public health. Today, we should all pause for a moment and remember the life of this outstanding physician."

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