GENEVA ¦ 27 February 2013 – More than **360 million people** in the **world** have **disabling hearing loss**, according to new global estimates on prevalence released by the World Health Organization (WHO), for International Ear Care Day (3 March).

As the population ages globally, more people than ever before are facing hearing loss. One in three persons over the age of 65 years – a total of 165 million people worldwide – lives with hearing loss. Although hearing loss from ageing can often be helped with hearing devices, there are not enough produced to meet the need.

"Current production of hearing aids meets less than 10% of global need. In developing countries, fewer than one out of 40 people who need a hearing aid have one." says Dr Shelly Chadha of the WHO's Department of Prevention of Blindness and Deafness, "WHO is exploring technology transfer as a way to promote access to hearing aids in developing countries"

Another 32 million affected by hearing loss are children under age of 15. Infections of the ear are the leading cause of the disability, especially in low - and middle - income countries. Prevalence of disabling hearing loss is highest in South Asia, Asia Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa, according to the latest WHO review of available studies.

Infectious diseases such as rubella, meningitis, measles, mumps can lead to hearing loss. Most of these diseases can be prevented through vaccination. Other common causes include exposure to excessive noise, injuries to the ear or head, ageing, genetic causes, problems during pregnancy and childbirth (such as cytomegalovirus infection or syphilis) and the use of medications that can damage hearing.

"About half of all cases of hearing loss are easily preventable while many can be treated through early diagnosis and suitable interventions such as surgically implanted hearing devices. Individuals with hearing loss can also benefit from sign language training and social support."

WHO encourages countries to develop programmes for preventing hearing loss within their primary health care systems including vaccinating children against measles, meningitis, mumps and rubella, screening and treating syphilis in pregnant women, and early assessment and management of hearing loss in babies.