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Press Release

AFRICA MALARIA DAY - ALL PARTNERS IN MALARIA FIGHT URGED TO GET THEIR "ACT" TOGETHER

Push for universal access to Artemisinin-based Combination Treatments (ACT) – the most effective malaria treatments available today.

Geneva 24 April 2006 – Representatives of the African Union Permanent Delegation, African ambassadors and other Roll Back Malaria partners meeting in Geneva to commemorate Africa Malaria Day, called for accelerated action to make sure that life-saving Artemisinin-based Combination Treatments (ACT) get to those who urgently need them - especially in Africa. With a child dying from malaria every 30 seconds, they urged the entire malaria community to support countries to roll out ACTs as quickly as possible.

In Africa today, 34 countries have adopted ACTs as first-line treatment. However, only 17 out of 34 countries are currently deploying these medicines in their health systems. Financing for these treatments has come largely through grants from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria – but frequently implementation bottlenecks at country level are preventing the scale up of ACTs.

"More than ever before, we must get our ACT together if we want to reverse the progression of malaria. As well as increased financial resources, countries need significant technical support in management and procurement to implement their plans," stated Prof. Awa Marie Coll-Seck, Executive Secretary of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership, explaining the Africa Malaria Day theme which uses a play on words to call on the entire malaria community to action : ***Get your ACT Together ! Universal Access to Effective Malaria Treatment is a Human Right.***

"Malaria is a highly treatable disease, and it is with a sense of urgency that we need to make these life-saving medicines affordable and available to all," said Ambassador K.R. Masri, Permanent Observer of the African Union Delegation in Geneva. "More commitment must come from donors to ensure the Global Fund continues to be a reliable source of public health financing, in addition to other funding initiatives ," she added.

This year's "Get your ACT Together" theme is being interpreted in a number of ways around the world to boost support for the fight against malaria - a disease that kills at least a million every year and causes untold suffering and human misery to many – mostly women and children.

Tuesday's Africa Malaria Day commemorations in Africa will bring together individuals, community groups, entertainers and local, national and international dignitaries for a day of reflection, advocacy and mobilization around malaria. For example, in Somalia, the Ministry of Health and UNICEF will officially launch ACTs in all 130 public health facilities across the country and increase public information and education on the availability of these treatments.

Across the Atlantic, in Washington DC, the Global Health Council and Friends of the Global Fight are hosting a briefing on Capitol Hill to encourage the advancement of the President's Malaria Initiative in the fight against malaria. A high-level reception at the World Bank preceded by a press conference is also being planned to highlight the key partnerships that have contributed to the success so far of their Booster Program.

Europe will commemorate Africa Malaria Day in Brussels, with briefings for both the European Union Parliament Development Committee and the Belgian Senate on how partnerships can effectively tackle malaria control.

Background – ACTs

The inappropriate use of antimalarial drugs during the past century has contributed to many deaths - the vast majority in children under five. Antimalarial drugs were deployed on a large scale, always as monotherapies and were generally poorly managed in that their use was continued despite unacceptably high levels of resistance. However, over the past decade, a new class of drugs derived from the plant *artemisia annua* has brought new hopes - artemisinin. When used correctly in combination with other anti-malarial drugs, artemisinin is nearly 95% effective in curing malaria.

The GFATM provides more than half of all donor spending on malaria and particularly ACTs. Now that the Global Fund has been operational for several years, the earliest grants are coming to their end. Additional funding rounds are the only way to ensure that countries will have the opportunity to apply for new grants to continue their ACT scale up. The Global Fund Board will meet just after Africa Malaria Day from April 26 – 28 and the crucial decision will be taken - to call OR not to call a Round 6. The Global Fund needs urgent funding commitments from donors to be able to announce a Round 6.

The Roll Back Malaria Partnership

To provide coordinated international approach to fighting malaria, the Roll Back Malaria Partnership (RBM) (www.rollbackmalaria.org) was launched in 1998 by the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. The Partnership now brings together governments of countries affected by malaria, their bilateral and multilateral development partners, the private sector, non-governmental and community-based organizations, foundations, and research and academic institutions around the common goal of halving the global burden of malaria by 2010.

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