



Press Release WHO/33  
25 April 2003

---

## **MALARIA IS ALIVE AND WELL AND KILLING MORE THAN 3000 AFRICAN CHILDREN EVERY DAY**

---

### *WHO and UNICEF call for urgent increased effort to Roll Back Malaria*

Nairobi/Geneva/New York, 25 April 2003 -- The *Africa Malaria Report*, released today by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), says the death toll from malaria remains outrageously high - with more than 3000 African children dying daily. It also stresses that new effective anti-malarial drugs are not yet accessible to those who need them and that only a small proportion of children at risk of malaria are protected by highly effective insecticide treated nets. The report, officially launched by President Mwai Kibaki of Kenya in commemoration of Africa Malaria Day, gives a continent-wide picture of the struggle against malaria and highlights the urgent need to make effective anti-malarial treatment available to those most at risk.

"The Roll Back Malaria Initiative has made considerable progress since it was launched in 1998, but we need to increase efforts to combat a devastating disease which is holding back the development of many African countries," states Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director General of WHO. "Malaria continues to tighten its grip on Africa. By scaling up our efforts, we can reverse this trend."

An estimated 20 per cent of the world's population — mostly those living in the world's poorest countries — is at risk of contracting malaria. Malaria causes more than three hundred million acute illnesses and kills at least one million people every year. Ninety per cent of deaths due to malaria occur in Africa, south of the Sahara, and most deaths occur in children under the age of five.

"Malaria kills an African child every 30 seconds, and remains one of the most important threats to the health of pregnant women and their newborns," said Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF. "We have the knowledge and the potential to achieve our target of reducing the global burden of malaria by half by 2010, but we need much greater investment and political commitment".

The *Africa Malaria Report* challenges the global community to step up the momentum by:

- Increasing global investment to support implementation of programmes to control malaria in endemic countries;
- According higher priority to malaria on the health agenda of endemic countries;
- Encouraging greater private sector involvement in the national supply and distribution of quality antimalarial drugs, and insecticide treated nets;

- Ensuring the availability of the new generation of highly effective antimalarial combination drug treatments to populations at risk;

The *Africa Malaria Report* acknowledges the contribution of global efforts to the substantial progress already made by a number of countries that have adopted cost effective strategies to fight the disease with greater focus on the most vulnerable - women and young children.

The good news is that insecticide-treated bed nets (ITNs) offer substantial protection against malaria. The proper use of ITNs combined with prompt treatment for malaria at community level can reduce malaria transmission by as much as 60% and the overall young child death rate by at least one fifth.

In Tanzania a three-year community pilot project has seen the proportion of infants sleeping under insecticide treated nets rise from 10% to 50% and the child death rate fall by more than 25%. Similarly a community programme in Zambia achieved net coverage of more than 60% of individuals at risk.

Community health workers and mothers of young children in more than 10 districts in Uganda have been trained to recognize the symptoms of malaria and seek immediate treatment as part of a home-based approach to the management of malaria. This approach encourages the active participation of local drug sellers and the pharmaceutical industry in malaria control efforts. Interim results suggest a definite decline in the number of outpatient malaria cases in children under five. Ghana and Nigeria have also introduced this home-based approach.

"The Africa Malaria Report shows how the partnership established to roll back malaria is increasing support for endemic countries' continued fight against this disease. The global partnership is at a crucial juncture; it needs to sustain and surpass the support galvanised to date. Our challenge is to live up to the commitments made five years ago and not fail yet another generation of African children. This would be unacceptable," stated Dr Nafo-Traoré, Executive Secretary, RBM Partnership Secretariat.

## **Background on Roll Back Malaria**

Roll Back Malaria (RBM) was launched in 1998 with the declared objective of halving the global burden of malaria by 2010. Its founding partners - the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, The World Bank and the WHO - agreed to share their expertise and resources in a concerted effort to tackle malaria worldwide, with a particular focus on Africa.

Since the launch of Roll Back Malaria international spending on malaria has more than trebled to a current figure of US\$ 200 million a year. Comprehensive strategic plans to tackle malaria have been developed in more than 30 endemic African countries and significant additional resources secured to implement these plans from the new Global Fund to fight AIDS Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM).

The RBM initiative is a global partnership including malaria endemic countries, bilateral and multilateral donors, the private sector, and NGOs, and has succeeded in raising global awareness of malaria, generating increased resources and achieving consensus on the tools and priority interventions required to control the disease.

At the Abuja Summit in Nigeria on 25 April 2000, 44 African leaders reaffirmed their commitment to roll back malaria and set interim targets for Africa. They challenged other world leaders to join them in recognizing the importance of tackling malaria as a disease of poverty.

Following the Abuja summit, 25 April was declared "Africa Malaria Day", and a subsequent UN resolution declared 2001 - 2010 "The Decade to Roll Back Malaria, especially in Africa", giving prominence to malaria in the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.

Of 44 countries that signed the Abuja Declaration in 2000, 25 endemic countries in Africa have submitted successful proposals to the Global Fund to fight AIDS Tuberculosis and Malaria for funding support to scale-up implementation of their national malaria control plans.

Eighteen endemic countries have now reduced or eliminated taxes and tariffs on anti-malarial products including mosquito nets and insecticides - helping to make these essential products more accessible.

\*\*\*

For further information, please contact:

Pru Smith, Roll Back Malaria Partnership Secretariat, +41 22 791 4586 [smithp@who.int](mailto:smithp@who.int)

Mohammad Jalloh, UNICEF Media, +1 212 326 7416, [mjalloh@unicef.org](mailto:mjalloh@unicef.org)

Victor Chinyama, UNICEF Nairobi, + 254-2-622218, [vchinyama@unicef.org](mailto:vchinyama@unicef.org)

All WHO Press Releases, Fact Sheets and Features as well as other information on this subject can be obtained on Internet on the WHO home page <http://www.who.int/>