



SEA PR 1504

WHO urges increased funding to combat Malaria

New Delhi, 23 April 2010: On World Malaria Day (25 April), WHO is urging a bolder commitment from donors and Member States to bring malaria under control. There are approximately 2.5 million confirmed malaria cases officially reported annually, but the actual figures are much higher; estimates are that there are at least 20-30 million cases and 100000 deaths each year.

Malaria remains a major health problem in the South-East Asia Region, where 77% of the population is at risk. A disease without borders, it is nevertheless preventable and treatable. "Increasing funding for effective interventions could significantly reduce malaria deaths in many countries. In WHO's South-East Asia Region, several countries have made good progress and demonstrated that support for malaria control is working," said Dr Samlee Plianbangchang, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia.

The most vulnerable populations are generally poor and have low educational status. Many of them live in slums, while others are tribal populations. Highly mobile groups who live in border areas where the health systems tend to be weaker or even absent are at high risk. Member States realize that it is almost impossible to control malaria at international borders without strong collaboration between the concerned Member States from national level down to local border levels.

Malaria is endemic in all the countries in WHO's South-East Asia Region, except the Republic of Maldives, and the situation is becoming increasingly difficult to control due to several technical and managerial problems. Repeated focal epidemics are common, due to socio-environmental changes; many cases are due to population migration. There is no doubt that malaria adversely affects economic development, particularly the livelihood of the poor.

Dr. Jai P. Narain, Director, Communicable Diseases, WHO, SEARO said, *"It is well understood that reducing the impact of malaria would be highly significant in achieving the Millennium Development Goals".* Dr. Narain further added, *"But to do so, we need to address the social, economic, environmental and behavioural factors that contribute to the disease's occurrence and its impact".*

Resistance to chloroquine, the cheapest and most common anti-malarial drug, has spread throughout the Region. Moreover, multidrug-resistant strains of the Falciparum parasite are present in several countries, and the resistance level is growing, posing a threat to all means of effective case management. *"As in the past, the Thai-Cambodian border is a home to the emerging drug resistance. The two countries and several partners, donors as well as WHO are working relentlessly to eliminate this dreadful parasite from this hot spot."* said Dr Narain.

Adequate resources are needed for key interventions that have proven highly effective, such as long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs) and artemisinin-based combination therapy (ACT) for treatment of the deadly malaria parasites. Given the huge population at risk, the demand for these interventions is enormous. The Region needs at least 150 million more LLINs (every three years) and 15 million ACT dosages (annually), besides other resources to make an impact upon the disease situation in the Region.

“We have made significant progress in controlling malaria in the Region where we could muster resources to control the disease”, said Dr Narain. A measurable success is evident in Sri Lanka and DPR Korea, where both the countries have reached the elimination stage. Bhutan has also made good progress, having reached high coverage of bednets and increased access to ACT. The country is now aiming towards malaria elimination. Reported malaria deaths have decreased significantly in Bangladesh and Myanmar with improved case management and adopting, the ACT therapy. Thailand has reported a steady decline in cases and deaths. In other countries improvement is relatively slow, but steady progress was observed in providing LLINs to those who are at risk.

Dr Plianbangchang stressed that *“World Malaria Day is an opportunity to remind the world that though progress has been made in malaria control, this ancient disease remains a threat to humanity. It is time to increase our effort and work together to vanquish malaria once and for all.”*

Further Reference:

25 April commemorates the global effort to provide effective control of malaria around the world. This year's **World Malaria Day** marks a critical moment. The international community has less than a year to meet the **2010 targets** of delivering effective and affordable protection and treatment to all people at risk of malaria, as called for by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon.

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