

Press Release

Steady progress made towards treating TB in Timor-Leste

Dili, 12 October 2010: A greater number of new positive Tuberculosis (TB) cases are being detected now in Timor-Leste compared to nine years ago. Of these new cases, about 85% are being successfully treated.

Timor-Leste's TB burden was first recorded in 1995 and averaged 707 cases per 100,000 of its population. Today it stands at 378 cases per 100,000 of its population.

"Timor-Leste is on track to meeting the MDG goal of halving the number of TB cases in the country by 2015. However this disease still poses a heavy burden in our country," says Dr Nelson Martins, Minister of Health.

Tuberculosis is a disease caused by a bacterium called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The bacteria usually attack the lungs, but TB bacteria can attack any part of the body such as the kidney, spine, and brain. If not treated properly, TB disease can be fatal.

"I particularly want to stress the importance of our Timorese doctors who have returned from Cuba to be sensitized to the TB programme's needs and receive training on standard diagnostic and treatment protocol of the National TB Control Programme (NTP)," stressed Dr Martins, who was the founding manager of the NTP when the programme was established in 2000 by Caritas.

The country's National TB Control Programme next five year strategy is an ambitious one. From now till 2015, it aims to further improve access to TB diagnostic services with a focus on reaching the marginalized and vulnerable groups and strengthen the recording and reporting of data as part of its immediate action.

The National TB Control Programme is integrated within the Ministry of Health. It receives funding from the Global Fund and technical support from the World Health Organization. Various partners including South Australia Pathology, the Catholic Clinic network supported by CARITAS, Clinic Café Timor and the Bairo Pite Clinic in the capital Dili are integral in the success of the programme to date.

"The firm and dedicated support from both our national and international partners have been significant in the control of TB in Timor-Leste. I'm extremely grateful for this and look forward to our continued partnership," stressed Dr Martins at the launch of the country's Stop TB Strategy for 2011-2015.

For further information contact:

Shima Roy, Communications Officer, WHO Timor-Leste, email: roysh@searo.who.int
Mobile: (+670) 7540321