TIMOR-LESTE COMMITTED TO RE-ESTABLISH THE MASS DRUG ADMINISTRATION (MDA) PROGRAM TO ELIMINATE NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES INCLUDING LYMPHATIC FILARIASIS AND SOILED TRANSMITTED HELMINTHS.

A National Workshop to launch the elimination program of Lymphatic Filariasis and Control of intestinal parasite infections in Timor-Leste was conducted at Delta Nova hall, Dili, Timor-Leste on Thursday 07 February 2013.

The workshop was well attended and had the participation of key personalities that lend their support toward the elimination program such as the Peace Nobel Laureate and former President of Timor-Leste, Dr Jose Ramos Horta. The Vice Minister of Health for Ethics and Service Delivery, Ms Natalia de Araujo as well as the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Constancio Pinto, the Secretary of State for Water and Sanitation Mr Elias Pereira Moniz, the Reitor Magnifico UNTL, Mr Aurelio Guterres, Dr Joao Martins, Dean Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (UNTL), former Minister of Health, Professor Nelson Martins, Ambassador of Australia, Mr Miles Armitage, the Minister Counsellor of the Japan Embassy Mr Satoshi Nakajima and representatives from other international organization such as AUSAID, USAID, KOICA, the Cuban Brigade, WaterAid, etc… as well as national and international NGOs, also marked their presence at the workshop.

In his speech, Dr Ramos Horta (who was on his way to the airport to take over his new appointment as Special Representative to the UN Secretary General to Guinea-Bissau), highlighted the importance to support these two initiatives. He himself has actively
participated in fund raising for this program in Australia through the *Fundo Isin Diak* and will continue to do so until the disease is eliminated.

The *Vice minister for Health Timor-Leste, Ms Natalia Araujo*, clearly stated the commitment of the government of Timor Leste to re-establish the MDA program from 2013 onwards. In the past, the MDA stopped due to the lack of donors support; this time the government guarantee that there will be sufficient funds provided to this elimination effort, both from the government and donors support.

A Global and Regional overview of the elimination of LF was presented by *WHO Representative Dr Jorge Luna*. The results of the National Parasite survey - 2012 was presented by *Ms Luzia Freitas* – one of the co-investigators of the study. She mentioned that the results showed a LF sero-prevalence of 17.5% and STH was 29%.

*Ms Isabel Gomes – the Director of Community Health of the MoH* presented the past, current and the future plan of the Ministry of Health in regard to the elimination program of LF and control of STH. She again emphasized the commitment of the government to re-commence the MDA program. She also highlighted the gaps that need to be completed both by the government and donors. Next, *Professor Peter Mcminn* presented the support that the *University of Sydney* is providing for the Neglected Tropical Diseases Control in Timor-Leste. He underlined the importance of integrating NTDs into the MDA program particularly for Yaws elimination. He stressed that the University of Sydney and the Rotary Club Sydney through the *Fundo Isin Diak* are committed to the MDA program to a total of USD $100,000 per year until the MDA program is completed.

Lastly *Ms Anupama Tantri* who is a Senior Program Officer with the Global Network and oversees program, advocacy and resource mobilization activities in the Asia and Pacific region at the *Sabin Institute, Washington DC*, presented their commitment for advocacy donors to support Timor-Leste’s Mass Drug Administration program. The workshop recommended the need to immediately establish High Level Steering committee to follow-up the results of the workshop particularly on resource mobilization followed by the establishment of a Task Force to work on the detail plan and implementation of the program.
Photographs:

Members of the *Santo Antonio* dance group perform a traditional Timorese dance from Suai, Bobonaro and Viqueque districts (*Photo Credit WHO-TLS*)

HE Dr Ramos Horta, HE Mr Miles Armitage (Australian Ambassador), Dr Nelson Martins (former Minister of Health), Ms Tanya Wells-Brown (USAID), Dr Luna (WHO Rep-TLS), Dr Joao Martins (Dean, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences, UNTL) and HE Dr Aurelio Guterres, Reitor Magnifico Universidade Nacional do Timor Lorosae (*Photo Credit WHO-TLS*).

Dr Jorge Luna during his presentation of the Global and Regional situation of Lymphatic Filariasis (*Photo Credit WHO-TLS*)

Dr Rafael representing the Cuban Brigade chats with Dr Luna, WHO Representative, Timor Leste (*Photo Credit WHO-TLS*)
Panelists, Dr Jorge Luna (WR-TLS), Dr Telma de Oliveira (Moderator) and Mrs Luzia Freitas (Photo Credit WHO-TLS).

Participants to the National Stakeholders workshop to support the Elimination Program of Lymphatic Filariasis and control of Helminths infection in Timor-Leste (Photo Credit WHO-TLS)

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