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27 January 2005

UK TAKES THE LEAD IN PREVENTING MALARIA DEATHS



Prime Minister Tony Blair today pledged £45 million to provide insecticide treated mosquito nets for young children and pregnant women in Africa as part of a drive to tackle one of the major infectious disease scourges of Africa: malaria. Mr Blair announced this contribution at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Sharing a platform with Bill Gates and Bono, Mr Blair said:

"Malaria kills over a million people in Africa each year. The majority are young children. Around 10,000 women die each year from problems associated with malaria infection during pregnancy."

"This tragedy need not happen. It is almost entirely preventable using technologies that are already available. Widespread use of insecticide treated mosquito nets and a new class of malaria drugs known as artemisinin combination therapy (ACT) can radically reduce disease and death."

"The recent Millennium Project report [Investing in Development](#) identifies malaria control as a 'quick win', where rapid concerted action could have dramatic effects in improving people's lives. The report calls for the mass distribution of mosquito nets and effective antimalaria medicines for all children in Africa by 2007. The world should be ready to heed this call."

"We estimate that for £300 million we could have enough nets to cover virtually all pregnant women and children under five who need them in Africa.

"I can announce today that the UK is ready to meet more than its share of the total cost through a contribution of at least £45 million - to cut deaths from malaria in Africa. I will be pressing the G8 to make a commitment to meet the rest of this bill."

Insecticide treated mosquito nets are one of the most effective ways of preventing malaria. They can cut infant mortality by at least 20 percent and are cheap, safe and easy to use. If used properly, they can last for at least five years.

Scaling up the delivery of drug combination therapies – ACTs – will also be extremely cost effective, even in the most resource-poor countries. The UK will host a replenishment conference for the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria in 2005, to ensure that African countries have the funding to access sufficient supplies of ACTs. We will strengthen links with partners in the private sector to scale up production capacity.

Research into new technologies, such as a vaccine, is promising and could in time transform our ability to control malaria. We will develop new ways to stimulate greater investment in research and development of new drugs, diagnostics and vaccines by supporting product development partnerships and through advance purchase commitments.

Mr Blair added:

"I have no doubt at all that the people of Africa have the talents and energy to beat the problems facing them. All they need is the help and commitment from the rest of us. We owe them nothing less."

Notes to Editors

1. Mr Blair made his announcement today during a video statement on the G8 website.
2. Detailed figures on the total resource needs for malaria will be available in early 2005. An intensive effort to provide treated long lasting mosquito nets for children in Africa would require about £300 million over the next two years. Providing enough anti-malaria treatment for children would require an additional £200 million over the next two years. Together, these investments could save most children who would otherwise die from malaria in Africa.
3. Africa will be a central focus of the UK's presidencies of the G8 and EU in 2005. The UK is committed to increase our support to Africa to £1.25 billion by 2007/08.
4. The UK overseas aid department DFID already supports insecticide treated net (ITN) programmes through its direct support to countries and through multilateral agencies. The additional funds will be channelled through these mechanisms, for example, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria.
5. Through its country and multilateral programmes DFID supports a comprehensive approach to malaria control, including ITNs. Other important components are:
 - . Scaled up delivery of new drug combination therapies;
 - . Increased support for country efforts to ensure health services have the resources to prevent and treat the main causes of ill health and death;
 - . Increased support for R&D on a malaria vaccine and new drugs to treat malaria;
 - . Support for advance purchase commitments to further stimulate development of a malaria vaccine.
6. Example of successful use of insecticide treated mosquito nets: - In a large-scale social marketing programme in two rural districts in Tanzania, ITN coverage of infants rose from less than 10% at baseline to more than 50% 3 years later. ITN use was associated with a 27% increase in survival of children aged 1 month to 4 years and a 63% reduction of anaemia.
7. DFID is the UK Government department responsible for promoting sustainable development and reducing poverty. The central focus of the Government's policy is a commitment to the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015. These seek to:
 - a. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
 - b. Achieve universal primary education
 - c. Promote gender equality and empower women
 - d. Reduce child mortality
 - e. Improve maternal health
 - f. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
 - g. Ensure environmental sustainability
 - h. Develop a global partnership for development
8. For further information please contact Geraldine Platten, DFID press office on 020 7023 0533.

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