

## **Message of the WHO Regional Director for Africa, Dr Luis Sambo, on the Occasion of World Malaria Day 2012**

Today, 25 April 2012, we celebrate World Malaria Day under the theme "Sustain Gains, Save Lives: Invest in Malaria". The theme draws attention to the progress made and urgent need for adequate investment to defeat malaria.

The 2011 WHO World Malaria Report indicates that the African Region accounts for 81% of the malaria cases that occurred worldwide. Over 90% of the deaths due to the disease occur in the Region and 86% of these deaths are among children below five years of age. Pregnant women, people living with HIV and AIDS and victims of disasters are also particularly vulnerable to malaria.

During the past ten years, there has been a growing political commitment at country, regional and international levels to tackle malaria. Sessions of the UN General Assembly, World Health Assembly, the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, the WHO Regional Committee for Africa have all injected renewed momentum to initiating appropriate and sustainable action to address the malaria burden. The African Leaders Malaria Alliance (ALMA) has launched a scorecard for accountability and action to end malaria related deaths. Increased funding by Member States, bilateral and multilateral organizations as well as improved access to effective prevention and treatment have all contributed to reducing the burden of malaria.

As a result of this momentum, malaria deaths have been cut by one third in Africa within the last decade. Overall child mortality was reduced by 20% in countries where malaria control has improved most significantly. Heightened global interest in moving towards malaria elimination underscores the need to accelerate the scaling up of interventions. Community case management, using rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs) is improving treatment and surveillance through confirmed case reporting. The prospect of a coordinated approach to malaria elimination in Southern Africa has led to the Elimination 8 initiative, which aims to improve cross border collaboration by jointly controlling

malaria within and among eight SADC countries. Several other countries are aiming at expanding malaria-free Areas.

In spite of this progress, the Region is still a long way from achieving the global, regional and national malaria control targets. The gains achieved are fragile and malaria will resurge if we become complacent. Reduction in development aid may jeopardize achievements. Gaps in financing country plans aiming at reaching all exposed individuals with prevention and treatment interventions must be filled.

Addressing the malaria disease burden in the Region requires multi-sectoral and concerted actions of all stakeholders. Increased financial and technical support to national programs will accelerate progress. Removing substandard or counterfeit medicines will help prevent the development of parasite resistance to recommended medicines. Rigorous monitoring of mosquito resistance to insecticides and parasite resistance to antimalarials is equally critical to protect the effectiveness of current interventions. Research on new insecticides, medicines and malaria vaccine candidates will be essential for the next phases of our fight.

I call upon all Member States, African communities, UN Agencies, development Institutions, Foundations and international partners to come together for the ‘final push’ towards universal access by putting malaria control and elimination at the core of poverty reduction strategies. Our investments will contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal 6 target of halting and beginning to reverse the incidence of malaria and will improve child and maternal health.

Let us invest to defeat Malaria!