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UN envoy stresses malaria deaths can be eradicated, urges world to build on gains



A mother and her newborn child lay under a mosquito bed net. Most malaria-carrying mosquitoes bite at night

25 April 2011 – Efforts to combat malaria in Africa are bearing fruit with 11 countries where the disease is endemic reporting a 50 per cent decline in mortality as a result of a global initiative to combat the disease, United Nations envoy Ray Chambers said today, calling for sustained efforts to eradicate deaths from the illness.

“Our goal is to reach close to zero deaths from malaria by 2015,” [said](#) Mr. Chambers, the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Malaria. “There is much work to be done – many hurdles – but we are optimistic that we can achieve that goal,” he told reporters at UN Headquarters on World Malaria Day.

Malaria, which is caused by a parasite transmitted to humans through the bites of infected mosquitoes, kills nearly 800,000 people around the world every year with most of the deaths occurring in Africa.

Mr. Chambers said the Tanzanian island of Zanzibar reported no deaths from malaria when he visited there last year.

“The Secretary-General’s malaria goals have galvanized funding and implementing partners, together with African leaders and others at the forefront of the effort, and the results of this

partnership are translating directly into lives saved in historic proportions,” Mr. Ray said in a separate joint statement issued by his office and the Roll Back Malaria partnership.

The partnership, which includes Mr. Chambers’ office, has championed an effort to provide insecticide-treated bed nets to all people who live in malaria-endemic countries, as well as making effective treatments available. He said close to \$5 billion has been invested in the anti-malaria initiative in sub-Saharan Africa over the recent past and the returns have been “immense.”

According to the joint statement, more than 300 million long-lasting insecticide-treated mosquito nets have been distributed in Africa, and 75 million people are benefiting from indoor residual spraying. Access to diagnostic testing and effective treatments have saved nearly 750,000 lives over the past decade.

“On World Malaria Day this year, there is much to celebrate,” said UN [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon in a [statement](#). “Since 2008, more than 600 million Africans have been spared terrible suffering,” he said.

“Yet an estimated 781,000 people a year, most of them young children, still die from this preventable and treatable disease. To reach our goal of near zero deaths from malaria by 2015, we need an extraordinary intensification of our actions,” Mr. Ban added.

His sentiment was echoed by representatives from the World Bank, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and the United States’ President’s Malaria Initiative – the three largest donors to the effort – and UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)), the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) and the Roll Back Malaria partnership.

They said that investing in malaria is not only an entry point for strengthening primary health care systems at the facility and community level, but is also on the critical pathway to achieving all of the health-related Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)).

Speaking at a reception at UN Headquarters to a launch photo exhibition entitled “Champions to End Malaria,” the Secretary-General thanked all partners in the anti-malaria campaign, saying their efforts had proved that success can be achieved with smart policies, targeted interventions, resources, and commitment.

“We have our roadmap. I will continue to look to all of you for leadership, funding, and innovation. I look forward to continuing our work together to finally eliminate a disease that has needlessly taken so many lives,” [said](#) Mr. Ban.

Awa Marie Coll-Seck, the Executive Director of the Roll Back Malaria partnership stressed that the impact of the anti-malaria initiative is visible, giving the example of her own country, Senegal, where she once worked as a doctor and where the disease used to be the first cause of consultation, hospitalisation and death. “When I go back today to the same country, what I see in hospitals is that often you have some beds empty [...] It is amazing change.”

“But we need to know that all these gains are very fragile and we need to maintain the work we are doing, we need to maintain and push for more leadership and ownership by countries,” she told the news conference.

United States singer-actress Mandy Moore spoke of a “gratifying trip” to the Central African Republic where she felt honoured to present a bed net to a mother who had lost two children to malaria and was excited that the net would prevent the rest of her family from the mosquito bites that spread the disease.

Deputy UN Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro praised the contributions of the private sector to the anti-malaria effort.

“You are engaged and committed to relieving the untenable burden that this disease places on millions of people, particularly on the African continent, because of your sense of global citizenship,” Ms. Migiro [told a breakfast meeting](#) organised by the Roll Back Malaria initiative for its corporate partners. “In doing so, you will help avert the tremendous loss of productivity that is among malaria’s terrible tolls,” she added.

According to UNICEF, fighting malaria not only saves children’s lives, but also yields many other health and economic benefits, including easing the burden on health centres and improving the lives of pregnant mothers and their babies. Controlling malaria can also reduce deaths due to malnutrition.

“We cannot leave some children exposed to malaria and other children safe,” [said](#) Anthony Lake, the UNICEF Executive Director. “Whether it is insecticide-treated nets, proper diagnosis, or effective treatment, the challenge is to provide protection and care to every single child who is at risk,” he added.

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