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New York Office of Sport for Development and Peace
Bureau de New York pour le Sport au service du Développement et de la Paix

Tanzania enlists Sport in Fight against Malaria

For immediate release: United Nations, New York, 8 May 2006 – Tanzania is turning to sport and culture to raise awareness about the campaign to prevent malaria, the country’s biggest child killer, through a series of soccer matches to spread prevention messages and other initiatives, according to Deputy Minister of Information, Culture and Sports Joel Bendera. He addressed today in Dar es Salaam a group of journalists from the United States and Europe covering the country’s battle against the deadly disease.

The United Nations New York Office of Sport for Development and Peace organized the journalists’ trip in cooperation with the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, the UN Information Centre in Dar es Salaam, and the UN country team in Tanzania. The NABJ dedicated the trip to the memory of Akilah Amapindi, a student member who died during the association’s convention in Atlanta last year as a result of contracting malaria on a trip to Africa.

Malaria is the leading cause of death in Tanzania, with 14 to 19 million cases afflicting the country’s 37 million people each year and claiming 100,000 lives, many of whom are young children and pregnant women. The disease is the leading cause of outpatient hospital visits and drains 3.4% from the country’s GDP annually, according to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Goal 6 of the Millennium Development Goals calls for combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and gains against malaria boost progress towards the other goals.

“The Ministry began organizing soccer matches in rural areas last year, alerting fans about the need to use insecticide-treated bed nets through public address announcements, leaflets and banners,” said Mr. Bendera. The competitions are held at the village, ward and division level, with the winning teams receiving jerseys and two soccer balls carrying anti-malaria messages. The campaign has covered the Tabora, Mwanza, Shinyanga and Mara regions so far, and aims to reach the entire country. The Ministry is also sensitizing other ministries and organizations about the value of sport as a tool for raising awareness and mobilizing support for the Millennium Development Goals.

Two Tanzanian youth leaders, Angela Damas and Dimitri Furaha, are kicking off the Pan-African Youth Leadership Partnership against Malaria, which will use sports and cultural activities to alert young people across the continent about malaria’s threat and enlist them in activities to combat the disease. The initiative is a direct outcome of the series of United Nations Regional Youth Leadership Summits organized by the New York Office of Sport for Development and Peace, using sport and culture as entry points mobilize the new generation to taken action in support of the Millennium Development Goals and peace-building. The regional summits will culminate in the United Nations Global Youth Leadership Summit at the United Nations in New York at the end of October.

“Malaria interrupts daily life – keeping adults away from work, children away from school and sports people out of training – and at worst, it is a killer,” said Restituta Joseph Kemi, a malaria survivor and 10,000 meter runner who was captain Tanzanian Olympic Team Captain at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. He and Tanzanian marathoner Fokasi Wilborad Fullah, also a malaria survivor, joined with athletes from Ethiopia, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa at

the 2000 Olympics to highlight their support for the Roll Back Malaria campaign mounted by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other partners.

“We are mobilizing the power of sport and culture to accelerate the campaign against malaria.” said Djibril Diallo, Director of the United Nations New York Office of Sport for Development and Peace, who called sport “the world’s most powerful communications tool.”

The journalists will visit communities in the Arusha region in the north and in Zanzibar to see the impact of the disease and look at the increased use of long-lasting insecticide-treated bed nets to help combat malaria-carrying mosquitoes. They will also visit the A to Z Textile plant near Arusha, the first factory in Africa to produce the long-lasting nets through technology transfer arranged in a ground-breaking public-private partnership between Sumitomo Chemical, WHO, UNICEF and other organizations.

The New York Office partnered with the New York Knicks professional basketball team and Hedge Funds vs. Malaria in a “Dunk Malaria” event at a Knicks game at Madison Square Garden in New York in March. Fans dunked mini-basketballs to raise awareness and funds for the fight against the disease.

The Office will also work on behalf of the United Nations system with National Olympic Committees and National Football (soccer) Federations in Africa in order to enlist sports stars to send out messages on malaria and HIV/AIDS prevention and other key themes to advance the Millennium Development Goals. This advocacy campaign will use public service announcements, in-stadium videos and banners at major events, half-time shows, and cooperation with local media to reach wider audiences.

“It is important that our members have the opportunity to travel outside America to tell the story of Africa to American audiences, and this trip holds special significance because of the death of Akilah Amapindi,” said NABJ President Bryan Monroe, Assistant Vice President for news at Knight Ridder.

Supporters of the international press trip include the Kaiser Family Foundation, Sumitomo Chemical, and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The NABJ is a U.S. organization that provides its 4,000 members with career development, educational and other support. The NABJ group in Tanzania includes Mr. Monroe; John Yearwood, NABJ Treasurer and World Editor, Miami Herald; Bob Butler, Director of Diversity, CBS Radio and Television; Damaso Reyes, reporter/photographer, New York Amsterdam News; Ervin Dyer, reporter, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette; Deborah Douglas, Deputy Features Director, Chicago Sun Times; Keith Hadley, photographer, Atlanta Journal Constitution; Syandene Rhodes-Pitts, reporter/anchor, WMC-TV, Memphis; Cherie Berkley, Assistant Managing Editor, WebMD Health; and Stephanie Arnold, writer, Philadelphia Inquirer.

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