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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 makes gains against malaria with help from partners

For immediate release: United Nations, New York, 12 May 2006 – Long-lasting insecticide-treated bed nets and wider access to a new drug therapy are saving growing numbers of children and pregnant women on the island of Zanzibar and in other areas of Tanzania from the deadly scourge malaria, the country's biggest killer.

Ten journalists from National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) from the U.S. and three journalists from Europe were in Tanzania this week to report on the impact of the disease and the campaign against it. The United Nations New York Office of Sport for Development and Peace organized the journalists' trip in cooperation with the 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.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is providing two grants totaling \$6.1 million for a comprehensive malaria prevention and control strategy in Zanzibar, developed with help from the Roll Back Partnership in Geneva. Through the first grant, begun in 2003, 103,000 long-lasting insecticide-treated bed nets have been distributed to children under five and pregnant women, and 178,000 children under the age of five have been treated for malaria. Through a voucher scheme to subsidize the costs, the national health system aims to raise the percentage of women and children protected by the long-lasting nets to 60% by the end of this year—up from 7% in 2001. The second grant aims to improve early recognition and effective treatment of malaria cases, especially for pregnant women, and increase household ownership and use of the bed nets from 3% in 2003 to 80% by 2008.

In Jambiani, a community of 5,000 people, the journalists saw the initiative in action. Less than decade ago, malaria was the number one cause of illness, with more than half of the villagers contracting the disease more than once a year. In 2002, the program began distributing the bed nets free in the village, and in 2005, there were only 47 malaria cases reported and there have been no verified cases since last October.

The journalists also visited the A to Z Textiles plant in Arusha, the first factory in Africa to produce long-lasting insecticide-treated bed nets, which now accounts for 90% of the continent's manufacturing capacity for the nets. A new factory under construction next to the original facility will increase production from 3 million to 6 million nets per year. The technology was transferred to Tanzania in 2003 through a groundbreaking public-private alliance between Sumitomo Chemical, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and other partners.

Tanzania is turning to sport and culture to raise awareness about the campaign against malaria through a series of soccer matches to spread prevention messages and other initiatives, according to Deputy Minister of Information, Culture and Sports Joel Bendera, who met with the journalists in Dar es Salaam. 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. 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.

“We are seeing the power of sport and culture accelerate the campaign against malaria here in Tanzania,” said Djibril Diallo, Director of the United Nations New York Office of Sport for Development and Peace.

TechnoServe, a US-based non-profit organization, is helping mostly small farmers in several Tanzanian communities grow artemisia plants. An extract from the leaves of the plant is the key ingredient in artemisinin-based combination therapies, one of the latest and most potent weapons in fighting malaria. In Sambasha, a village in Arumeru district in the north, farmers showed the journalists their artemisinin crop. Many are growing the plants for the first time, and one farmer has earned enough money to pay for his two children to attend school and buy a television set.

“It is important that our members have the opportunity 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, who led the organization’s contingent.

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

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