



Meeting healthcare workforce gap is essential to success of TB control

Dr Jorge Sampaio, UN Special Envoy to Stop TB, calls for broad-based participation and commitment at World Conference opening

Paris (1 November 2006) – No single country can alone prevent or contain communicable diseases in our globalised, mobile world, according to Dr Jorge Sampaio, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Stop TB. Regional and international strategies, as well as community efforts, are essential to address problems like TB and HIV/AIDS, and responsibility for sustaining the healthcare infrastructure is also shared.

Dr Sampaio, who is the former President of Portugal, provided the opening guest lecture for the 37th Union World Conference on Lung Health on Wednesday, 1 November 2006. For health reasons, Dr Sampaio was unable to travel to Paris for the occasion, so the lecture was presented by video link from Portugal.

Speaking on the global responsibility to invest in the healthcare workforce to improve lung health, Dr Sampaio emphasised the context in which these efforts are taking place. 'I think everybody would agree that today health issues are clearly on the global development agenda and they are seen increasingly as a global public good,' he said.

Dr Sampaio pointed to the progress demonstrated by the increasing involvement of non-health sector entities, such as the World Bank and the European Union, and the influx of resources from private sources, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In addition to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM), new mechanisms are mobilising broad-based support, including UNITAID, the international drug purchase facility established by France, Brazil, Chile, Norway and the United Kingdom.

However, full funding of the Global Plan to Stop TB 2006–2015 will require an increase in funding of US\$30 billion, so 'our shared aim, our common commitment and our motto has to be "to do more, to do faster and to do better". "More, fast and better" since emergencies, like TB, cannot wait.' Five thousand people a day continue to die of TB each year even though it can be treated and cured for \$12.

Addressing the healthcare workforce shortage is central to meeting the Millennium Development Goal to have halted and started to reverse the incidence of TB by 2015. Human resources are a key element of the infrastructure – the 'blood of the entire health care system,' Dr Sampaio said.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates the global shortage of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals at 4.3 million, and a vastly disproportionate percentage of the shortage is in the very countries with the highest disease burden. Dr Sampaio cited one African health minister who recently told him that there were more doctors in a large Lisbon hospital than in his entire country. Statistically Africa carries 25% of the global disease burden, but has only 1.3% of the health workforce.

Dr Sampaio described a bottom-up approach that leverages existing assets as one way to begin meeting the demand. For example, Ethiopia has decided to concentrate on training basic and mid-level healthcare workers. To avoid losing time to the construction

of new nursing schools, they based the programme in existing technical and vocational centres, and, in the first two years, 9,000 new workers have been trained. The plan calls for training another 30,000 people over the next two years.

Dr Sampaio outlined other elements that will be critical to building a well-trained, stable healthcare workforce, particularly in low-income countries with a high burden of TB:

- Development of the community's sense of ownership over their own infrastructure and engagement of them in achieving improvements
- Commitment to improving career and salary structures and better training for the public health sector
- Partnerships between governments, communities and healthcare providers to make the best use of available human resources
- Involvement of the private and corporate sector, NGOs, charities and other stakeholders working within the public policies defined and coordinated by governments
- Better coordination of international actions and initiatives to avoid overlaps and gaps and to ensure that the real needs of people are met
- Development of a broad multilateral framework on migrations and cross-border movement of people based on a "code of good practices" that could replace the "brain drain" with a more mutually beneficial approach that fosters "skills circulation" between industrialised and developing countries.

To accomplish this agenda, Dr Sampaio said, will require a strong unified effort to raise the profile of tuberculosis, de-stigmatise the disease and make TB control a top priority on international political and development agendas.

As Special Envoy, he sees his role as working with WHO and the Stop TB Partnership to meet international goals by giving additional political visibility to TB, helping to generate public awareness, and persuading world leaders to play their part in fully funding and implementing the Global Plan to Stop TB.

The Union World Conference on Lung Health is an annual event organised by the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease. It continues through Saturday, 4 November at the Palais des Congrès in Paris. Online conference coverage is provided by the Kaiser Network at www.kaisernetwork.org/paris2006 For further information, please go to <http://www.iatld.org>

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