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PRESS-RELEASE

15 March 2002

WORLD TUBERCULOSIS (TB) DAY 2002 - "TB is a Medical and Social Problem"

EMBARGOED until 12 noon 22 March 2002

On Friday, 22 March at 12 noon, the organising committee of international and Russian state and public health organisations is calling a **press-conference**, devoted to the **WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY** under the topic "TB is a Medical and Social Problem".

In February 2002, health officials reported that new tuberculosis cases are dropping for the first time in many years in Russia. "This is related to the general stabilisation of living conditions in the country," explains Dr. Shilova, head of TB epidemiology and prevention department of the Scientific Research Institute of Phtisiopulmonology. "It is also conditioned by a decrease of TB incidence in prisons, where controlled treatment is easier to implement," she added.

This is welcome news, since the number of new tuberculosis cases has more than doubled in the last ten years in the Russian Federation. Health authorities reported some 342,000 active TB cases, including about 133,000 new ones in the country in 2001. Approximately 30,000 people die from tuberculosis each year. TB incidence in prisons is much higher compared to the general population in the country with over a million people behind the bars.

Tuberculosis is a complex problem that includes medical, social, economical and political aspects. About 70% of TB patients belong to the socially vulnerable groups, such as the poor, unemployed, ex-prisoners, homeless, alcoholics and migrants. Addressing their social needs is a key to improving treatment adherence, which explains why material support, psychological and legal advice, information dissemination and health education became important parts of anti-TB programmes.

TB control in Russia has proved to be very successful with the support of international organisations [Medecins Sans Frontieres, Merlin, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation), Partners in Health and International Organisation for Migration, Public Health Research Institute] and the Russian Red Cross. During the last four years this broad partnership under a strong leadership of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation and technical guidance of WHO ensured availability and accessibility of services and information.

However, there are no quick results in the fight against tuberculosis, a combined effort and long-term commitment by all partners is needed.

For participation in the press conference, please, make accreditations at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies office: (095) 937-5267/68 or <moscow12@ifrc.org> Galina Obukh, Information Officer.