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Landmark international meeting on tuberculosis opens in Brazil

23 March 2009—Rio de Janeiro—More than 1300 people gathered at the Centro de Convenções SulAmérica today for the opening of the Stop TB Partners' Forum. This eclectic crowd with a common purpose has arrived from every region of the world and includes ministers from countries heavily affected by tuberculosis (TB); representatives of donor country governments, international organizations and corporations; activists, former TB patients and researchers.

At a time when the outlook for improving health in developing countries appears challenged by the worldwide economic crisis, participants at this forum have joined forces to renew efforts on reducing the toll of TB worldwide. Their goal is to accelerate progress on meeting the targets of the Stop TB Partnership's Global Plan to Stop TB 2006-2015, which seeks to halve TB prevalence and deaths compared to 1990 levels by 2015.

"This is a landmark event. Here today, we have the largest single gathering of partner organizations from around the world working together on the global fight against tuberculosis in history. And it is happening in Brazil, a country that is confronting a serious threat from this disease but is making important strides against it," said Dr Jorge Sampaio, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Stop TB and the former President of Portugal.

At the opening of the meeting Dr Jose Gomes Temporão, Minister of Health of the Federative Republic of Brazil, pledged that Brazil's investments in public health--especially in tuberculosis and AIDS--will hold steady. Brazil increased spending on TB nearly eight-fold between 2000 and 2008, from US\$9 million to US\$70 million.

The centrepiece of the opening was the release of a progress report on the Global Plan to Stop TB. "This report shows major successes in many countries in diagnosing TB and curing it through effective treatment," said Dr Marcos Espinal, Executive Secretary of the Stop TB Partnership. "But we face serious challenges around the globe. One of them is the deadly mix of TB and HIV. The progress report shows that many countries are now doing a great job testing TB patients for HIV—but we have a long way to go before all people living with HIV around the world have access to TB prevention and treatment." TB is a leading killer among people living with HIV, who have weakened immune systems.

The report also points to enormous challenges on drug-resistant TB, he said. "Half a million people develop a dangerous form of drug resistant TB called MDR-TB every year. But only a small fraction of them get correct treatment for this disease."

Each year 9 million people around the world become ill with tuberculosis. Nearly 5000 people die of this preventable and curable disease each day. TB is a disease of poverty, affecting mostly young adults in their most productive years.

About the Stop TB Partnership

The Stop TB Partnership - whose secretariat is hosted by the World Health Organization - was established in 2000 to eliminate tuberculosis (TB) as a public health problem and ultimately realize a world free of TB. It consists of more than 1000 international, nongovernmental and governmental organizations, countries, donors and patient groups.

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