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MEDIA RELEASE

UN SPECIAL ENVOY VISITING AFRICA, CHALLENGING COUNTRIES TO TACKLE TUBERCULOSIS

1 December 2009 – Nairobi, Kenya – The United Nations Secretary General's Special Envoy to Stop Tuberculosis (TB) is visiting two African countries in a bold initiative to fight the spread of one of the biggest killer diseases on the continent. The mission is organized by the Stop TB Partnership in close collaboration with UNAIDS.

Dr. Sampaio, who is also a former President of Portugal, is asking key stakeholders including governments to take an active role in helping people in need to gain access to accurate TB diagnosis and effective treatment. The five-day official visit in the region will see Dr. Sampaio visit Ethiopia and Kenya.

TB is a major health issue in Africa and kills nearly two million people every year around the world--even though it can be cured with a six-month course of drugs that costs only US\$ 20. **The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that there are about 39,000 cases of death per year in Kenya caused by TB.**

Dr Sampaio has reiterated his request to Ministers of Health in Africa to set ambitious national targets and mobilize the funding necessary to reduce the number of people living with HIV who die unnecessarily of TB. He made the initial request at a Special Ministerial Session on TB in Kigali, Rwanda two months ago.

Dr Sampaio's visit to Kenya coincides with World AIDS Day, which is marked annually on December 1 across the globe. In Nairobi, an educational workshop for school children will focus on various aspects of the disease including its prevention and treatment. Mr Wilfried Lemke, the UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Sports, Development, and Peace will also be on hand and join Dr Sampaio at a football tournament for boys and girls aged 12 to 14.

The tournament, which will be held at Mathare Depot field and feature 24 seven-a-side teams, is aimed at creating more awareness about TB through sports. The initiative has been organized in partnership with the Government of Kenya, through the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation, Mathare Youth Sports Association and Vijana Amani Pamoja. Alive and Kicking and Street Football World are among other organizations engaged in the event.

The Stop TB Partnership will distribute an educational comic book featuring the international Portuguese football star and Stop TB Ambassador Luis Figo as the main character. The comic book--which targets children and young adults with key information on tuberculosis--will be distributed to children and the media at the football event. Figo was the 2000 European Footballer of the Year and 2001 FIFA World Player of the Year.

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Dr. Sampaio's visit will provide a follow up to the implementation of his Commitment with the Clinton Global Initiative, which is aimed at increasing the engagement of global leaders in the fight against TB/HIV. Dr. Sampaio is also expected to ask National AIDS Councils to systematically integrate TB in their programmes as one of the objectives of his visit.

Kenya ranks 13th among the top 22 countries contributing to the highest numbers of TB cases in the world, with an estimated 110,000 cases of TB last year, according to the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation. In addition, 46 percent of TB cases are related to HIV in Kenya requiring policymakers in the health sector to devise, in a concerted effort, new strategies to battle both diseases.

Dr. Sampaio's visit will also help support the establishment of an African Leaders Tuberculosis Alliance with the main goal of fostering collaboration among African countries to build up common strategies to avoid an epidemic of drug-resistant tuberculosis.

In Africa, TB is the leading killer of people living with HIV and this visit comes nearly four months before the World TB Day which is held each year on 24 March. There are nearly nine million new cases of TB worldwide.

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BACKGROUND

The Stop TB Partnership, which is hosted by the World Health Organization. Stop TB consists of more than 900 international organizations, countries, donors from the public and private sectors, and non-governmental and governmental organizations working together to eliminate TB.

The Partnership's Global Plan to Stop TB (2006-2015) sets forth a roadmap for treating 50 million people for TB and enrolling 3 million patients who have both TB and HIV on antiretroviral therapy over the next 10 years, saving about 14 million lives. It aims to halve TB prevalence and deaths compared with 1990 levels by 2015.

In September 2008, Dr Jorge Sampaio, spoke at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative and urged participants to intensify their commitment to collaborative action on HIV and TB. Dr Sampaio formally endorsed a Commitment with the Clinton Global Initiative to aim at increasing engagement of global leaders in supporting the coordination of TB and HIV services and ensure that their Ministries of Health implement nationwide programmatic scale up and capacity building for these combined services.

In order to implement the Commitment on TB/HIV, Dr Sampaio asked the Regional Director of the WHO Regional Office for Africa to include a special ministerial discussion on tuberculosis at the 59th Regional Committee with the aim of assessing progress in the implementation of the Maputo Declaration and agreeing on the next priority steps to advance the fight against TB and TB/HIV in the Region.

The Special Session was held on 3 September 2009 in Kigali, Rwanda, and introduced by the Chair, the Hon. Minister of Health of the U.R. of Tanzania. Key

note speeches were delivered by the Regional Director of the WHO Regional Office for Africa and Dr Sampaio himself.

Dr Sampaio inspired the audience with a powerful address highlighting the economic, social and personal burden of TB in the continent, the threat of MDR-TB in settings of high HIV prevalence and the engagement of African leaders needed to make concrete progress. He also focused on the special impact of in women.

Dr Sampaio made four requests to the attending Ministers of Health:

1. Set ambitious national targets and mobilize the funding necessary to reduce the number of people living with HIV who die unnecessarily of TB;
2. Mobilize HIV-affected communities, broader civil society and the private sector for a response to tuberculosis; and educate and empower them to become active partners in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of TB.
3. Support the establishment of an African Leaders Tuberculosis Alliance with the main goal of fostering collaboration among African countries to build up common strategies to avoid an epidemic of drug-resistant tuberculosis.
4. Target action to deliver world-class TB services through strengthened primary services.

The meeting was attended by delegations of all the 43 Member States of the WHO African Region. Ministers or representatives of Malawi, Benin and South Africa shared with participants the challenges they are confronted in their countries to tackle TB and TB-HIV epidemics, underlining progress and shortcomings as well main difficulties they face.

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