

**Ambassador Tobias Statement for Stop TB Partnership Website
(for release March 23, 2007)**

Where poverty and deprivation meet, you will find this vicious infectious disease. It moves rapidly and efficiently in cramped and crowded living conditions, where health facilities are non-existent or people cannot afford care. This disease devastates families and communities, and hinders economic opportunity.

The facts about the virulent killer tuberculosis (TB) are staggering. Nearly nine million people will develop tuberculosis (TB), and about two million will die this year alone. More than half of people who develop a highly infectious strain of the disease will die if it is untreated. Highly lethal strains of extensively drug resistant TB, now called XDR-TB, are virtually untreatable. TB is the leading killer of HIV-positive people. Because HIV and AIDS destroy the immune system, TB can take hold much easier.

In five of six regions of the world, TB is declining or stable, but in Sub-Saharan Africa, the TB epidemic is worsening rapidly, driven by the HIV epidemic and poverty. The picture is grim in Africa, but TB can be effectively brought under control across the globe, if the disease is effectively diagnosed and treated.

The U.S. is on the frontlines of this difficult battle to eliminate TB as a public health threat to humankind. The U.S. Government is a leading donor supporting the global expansion and strengthening of Directly Observed Therapy – Short-course (DOTS), and currently supports its expansion in nearly 40 countries. Cases treated under DOTS have increased from 1 million in December 2005 to 1.4 million in June 2006 to 2 million in December 2006 (an increase of 30% since June 2006). Through the U.S. Agency for International Development, the American people also support programs that provide technical assistance, training, advocacy, laboratory strengthening, and ensure a reliable drug supply to countries in need.

If we are to eliminate this disease, we must continue to strengthen laboratories to diagnose TB, train more health workers, mobilize communities, and to involve all providers in DOTS. And, in countries affected by HIV/AIDS, we must offer HIV testing and where possible anti-retroviral drugs to TB patients – while at the same time screening those infected with HIV for tuberculosis, and providing them effective TB treatment. We cannot win the battle against AIDS if we do not also fight TB.

Today on World TB Day, we focus attention on the devastating worldwide impact of the disease, the challenge of defeating TB, and the hope of doing so together.