

Civil Society Organizations Statement

At the Meeting on Tuberculosis under the High Patronage of H.R.H the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, Organized by the European Commission, WHO EURO and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)

June 30th – July 1st 2009.

Members of European Civil Society Organizations attending the Meeting on Tuberculosis issue this statement calling for the urgent attention of States of the EU Region to call to the facts that:

- **Although TB mortality rates have decreased or remained stable over recent years**, TB - a curable disease - kills nearly two million people per year worldwide, with around 65000 deaths per year in the WHO European Region, so 7 deaths every hour.
- **Despite the decline of TB incidence in the EU, in 2007, a total of 431 518 new cases were registered** in the 53 countries of the WHO European Region. Specifically, in the EU and EEA/EFTA countries substantial increases were observed in Malta and Iceland, and Ireland, Greece, United Kingdom and Sweden saw an increase in new cases¹.
- **Multi Drug Resistant and extensively drug resistant TB (M/XDR-TB) is on the rise and receiving inadequate or inappropriate responses.** It is alarming that in 2007 within the WHO European region, **some 10% (43,600 cases) of the new TB cases and 43% of re-treated cases were estimated to be MDR-TB cases and 42 300 HIV co-infections were estimated among the new TB cases.** Out of the 27 member states considered with high MDR TB burden, 15 are from Europe and 5 are from EU.
- **Meaningful civil society participation in policy and program development and implementation remains weak.** The contributions and perspectives of civil society in TB prevention and control remains relatively absent in policy and programmes, advocacy and decision making processes.
- **Financial resources and commitments for the TB global response remain insufficient.** The most recent data available on resources allocated to TB programmes (\$3 billion in 2009) and research (\$483 million in 2007) are insufficient compared to the \$5 billion needed for programs in 2009 and the \$2 billion for research in 2007. At these funding levels the targets set by *The Global Plan to Stop TB (2006-2015)* will not be realized by 2015. EU countries and national governments must invest in new diagnostics, vaccines and treatments.

In light of the current state of affairs, we urge Ministers of the European Region to:

- **Raise the standards of care and response to fight TB at national level.** Provide technical assistance to Ministries of Health and CSO engaged in fighting TB at national level, in order to help them restructure their health system to ensure that they can adequately respond to the epidemic by providing comprehensive care and support.
- **Re-emergence of the disease fuelled by the HIV epidemic and the development of MDR TB require renewed efforts** in both control programmes and activities to ensure early diagnoses, availability of appropriate therapy, and completion of treatments. Referring to the recent World Health Assembly Resolution 62.15, we call for “countries to develop country indicators and to support monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the measures outlined in this resolution”.
- **Special efforts to better integrate TB and HIV/AIDS control plans and implementation programs is needed.**
- **Support the development of and ensure access to new and more effective tools for TB control**, including diagnostic tools that can be used at the point-of-care, treatment regimens that are proven to be effective in children and compatible with HIV medications and new vaccines that will protect against all forms of TB and will be safe for people with HIV.
- National TB programmes to clearly outline the **role of civil society in TB control efforts in national plans.** National TB programmes to partner with civil society organizations to actively find TB cases among vulnerable communities.
- Make community based treatment and support, including for MDR TB, and active TB case finding key components of an effective TB response, in order to ensure that all TB patients, including **the most marginalized groups, e.g. migrants and drug users, are able to receive treatment that respects their human rights and ensures treatment success, according to the principles outlined in *The Patients' Charter for Tuberculosis Care.***
- **Meet the commitments made in Berlin in 2007 vis-à-vis securing sustainable financing by supporting the Global and Regional Plans to Stop TB 2006-2015** and addressing the funding gap between the total resources available and the resources needed to control TB.

We reiterate the offer of partnership from Civil Society to the Ministers of the European Region, presented on 22nd October 2007, at the WHO Ministerial Forum. Now that two years have passed, we strongly urge the European Commission to support civil society involvement in TB national response and strategy by:

- **Urgently creating a European Think Tank co-ordinated by DG SANCO**, with the mandate to relate to **TB in the EU and neighbouring countries:** exchanging information and contributing to a coordinated approach to combat TB, focusing on the European Union and the neighbouring countries; to facilitate informal consultation between the Commission, the Member States and the European countries.
- This should include **funding and promoting a civil society platform within the WHO Europe region** to facilitate stronger collaboration among civil society organisations, recognising their essential role as partners in national and regional TB control programmes. This process should be initiated as soon as possible, in order to allow region wide civil society contribution to the 2010 DG SANCO work plan.
- **Prioritizing TB in the agenda of the public health inter service group of the European Commission.**
- Ensuring that countries within the European region are not adversely affected by the next Global Fund eligibility criteria review. The European Commission and European states should develop together a strategy to **safeguard and sustain successful programs that protect the most vulnerable groups** in European high burden countries and encourages meaningful civil society participation.

¹ Source: <http://www.eurosurveillance.org/Public/PressReleases/ViewPressRelease.aspx?PressReleaseId=13>