

World Immunization Week: Power of vaccines still not fully utilized, says UN health agency

24 April 2017 – Vaccinations stave off 26 potentially deadly diseases, the United Nations health agency is emphasizing on the first day of World Immunization Week, which also marks the halfway point of the Organization's goal to stop millions of deaths from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Vaccines are one of modern medicine's major success stories – tackling infectious diseases by making people immune or resistant, stimulating the body's own immune system – having prevented at least 10 million deaths between 2010 and 2015, stresses Dr. Margaret Chan, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), in a [press release](#).

At the same time, the full potential of vaccines is still not fully utilized, underlines the UN health agency, reiterating that when immunization rates are high, the wider community is protected, including infants who are too young to receive their vaccines, older adults at risk of serious diseases and people who take medication that lowers their immune systems.

WHO warns that the target of all 194 countries that signed the agency's [global action plan](#) to eliminate vaccine-preventable diseases by 2020 is behind schedule. The list with preventable diseases includes measles, rubella, and maternal and neonatal tetanus.

In a statement, the agency stresses that – in order for everyone, everywhere to survive and thrive, countries must make more concerted efforts to reach Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP) goals by 2020.

WHO reports that by increasing immunization globally, the lives of an additional 1.5 million people could be saved every year.

The Decade of Vaccines

This year, Immunization Week falls at the halfway point of completing the target set by the Global Vaccine Action Plan to eliminate vaccine-preventable diseases. The goal of the plan is to improve the health of all people by extending the benefits of immunization through more equitable access to vaccines.

According to the WHO latest numbers, an estimated 19.4 million infants worldwide were not reached with routine immunization services such as [Diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis](#) (DTP3) immunization coverage.

In one of the Immunizations Week messages, Dr. Chan speaks on behalf of the world's children, who should be a prime concern of all societies, saying that – no child should be denied the right to immunization for unfair reasons,

including economic or social causes.” The WHO director adds that “all barriers must be overcome.”

Of the 19.4 million children without lifesaving DTP3 immunization about 11.5 million of them live in 10 countries, namely Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Ukraine.

The goal of all 194 GVAP signatories is to achieve vaccination coverage of at least 90% nationally and at least 80 per cent in every district by 2020.



Vaccine-preventable infectious agents or diseases. Source: WHO

[Status of declaration on indigenous peoples' rights in spotlight as UN forum opens in New York](#)

24 April 2017 – Speaking at the opening of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, senior UN officials today underscored the need to do more to ensure that indigenous peoples are able to benefit from global development agenda, including the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development.

“Far more needs to be done to fully realize the human rights of indigenous peoples,” said Durga Prasad Bhattarai, Vice-President of the UN General Assembly, on behalf of the President of the Assembly, Peter Thomson, underscoring the importance of the 2030 Agenda, the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change and the [Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#).

“Targeted strategies would ensure that indigenous peoples could fully participate in implementing those accords,” he added.

In his remarks, the Assembly Vice-President also highlighted that discussions were ongoing within the 193-member body on ways to enhance the participation of indigenous peoples within the Organization and urged UN Member States and indigenous peoples to participate in upcoming dialogues on a comprehensive draft text addressing the matter.

This year also marks the tenth anniversary of the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), a comprehensive statement emphasizing the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations.

Underscoring the importance of the Declaration, Lenni Montiel, the UN

Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development, noted that as indigenous peoples continue to suffer disproportionately from poverty, discrimination and poor health care, the world “can do better.”

“[Indigenous peoples’] collective and individual rights are too often denied; this is unacceptable. [...] we must do better,” he underscored.

Noting that indigenous peoples and UN Member States had requested increased engagement of the UN system, he spoke of the system’s response, and cited further examples of efforts, including the International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)), UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) and the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

Such efforts would continue through the new international development phase guided by the 2030 Agenda, noted Mr. Montiel.

Also speaking today, Cristián Barros Melet, Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council, said that while the 2030 Agenda made a commitment to “leave no one behind,” voluntary national reviews on implementation had shown the risk of indigenous peoples being left behind.

“[As] an advisory body of the Council, the [Permanent] Forum has an important role to play in providing specialized advice and recommendations. It is essential to review progress made to date and to consider what additional efforts were required,” he said.

The Permanent Forum should meanwhile continue its collaboration with other Council bodies, noted Mr. Barros Melet, underscoring that its recommendations would help ensure that provisions of the Declaration were promoted. He also expressed hope that it would provide advice and guidelines which ensured indigenous issues remained an integral part of UN’s work.

Also today, the Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, Lakshmi Puri, highlighted the importance of empowerment of indigenous women, noting that indigenous women and girls needed to be aware not only of their identity, but also their human rights, and they must claim those rights.

“No traditional culture or custom can be invoked to justify and perpetrate violence and harmful practices against indigenous women,” she said.

Highlighting the place of indigenous women and girls in the discussions and outcomes of the [2017 session](#) of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, she said that the international community could no longer tolerate a situation in which such precious stakeholders and actors for sustainable development were not only left behind, but also the furthest to reach.

Within the UN system, the Permanent Forum is mandated to deal with indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights.

It also works to raise awareness and promotes the integration and

coordination of activities related to indigenous issues within the UN system; and prepares and disseminates information on indigenous issues.

Its current (sixteenth) [session](#), the Permanent Forum runs until 5 May 2017.

[Starvation looms for 20 million, UN agricultural advisory group told at opening session](#)

24 April 2017 – If nothing is done soon, 20 million people will starve to death over the next six months in South Sudan, Somalia, north-eastern Nigeria and Yemen, the United Nations agricultural chief today warned the UN agency's Council.

Addressing the opening of the 165th session of the UN Food and Agricultural Organization ([FAO](#)) in Rome, Director-General José Graziano da Silva cautioned that famine – which is threatening those countries as a result of drought and ongoing conflict – will leave many dead and rip apart societies.

“Famine does not just kill people. It contributes to [social instability](#) and also perpetuates a cycle of poverty and aid dependency that endures for decades,” Mr. de Silva told the FAO Council.

Comprised of 49 elected countries, the FAO Council convenes between sessions to provide advice and oversight related to programs and the budget.

As part of the week-long Council, members will be briefed on the extent of the conditions in the countries facing famine, and in the case of South Sudan, where famine has already been declared in parts of the country.

Mr. de Silva also cautioned about family farmers and rural communities in the Lake Chad Basin, where people feel “hopeless” as they struggle with the impacts of climate change, related droughts, and the lack of public investment and opportunities for youth.

“If we do not support these people, they will have no option other than to join local militias or movements of distress migration,” the Director-General said.

Approval of projects and budget

The Council is also tasked with approving FAO's Programme of Work and Budget for the years 2018 and 2019.

The budget prioritizes areas where FAO can deliver “the greatest impact

[greatest impact](#) to Member countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including climate change mitigation and adaptation, sustainable agriculture production, water scarcity management, and building the resilience of poor family farmers, according to a press release.

Food and agriculture are central to the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), and FAO's work is projected to contribute to the achievement of 15 of the 17 Goals.

"This full alignment has been possible because of the centrality of food and agriculture to the sustainable development agenda 2030," Mr. da Silva said.

Council will also discuss a new scale of assessed contributions, which are the annual payments made by member countries to FAO.

[Conflict-related detainees in Afghanistan tortured, ill-treated in government facilities – UN](#)

24 April 2017 – A record number of people detained by Afghan police say that have been tortured or ill-treated in the past year, according to a new United Nations report, which notes however that the Afghan Government has committed to eliminating torture and ill-treatment in national detention facilities.

"The continuing torture and ill-treatment of conflict-related detainees is [a matter of serious concern](#), but we acknowledge the genuine commitment and the efforts of the Government to deal with this issue," said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan.

The report, [Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees: Implementation of Afghanistan's National Plan on the Elimination of Torture](#), is produced by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)).

The findings are based on interviews with 469 conflict-related detainees conducted from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2016 in 62 detention facilities administered by the National Directorate of Security (NDS), Afghan National Police (ANP) and other Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) across the country.

Some 45 per cent of the people interviewed said that they were tortured or ill-treated, according to UNAMA and OHCHR.

The figure represents the highest level documented since UNAMA began its

current monitoring programme in 2010, according to the UN political mission.

Among other findings, the UN reported that about 45 per cent of the child detainees – 38 out of 85 children interviewed – gave credible accounts of being tortured or ill-treated.

The torture appears to be linked to forcing confessions, according to the report, and stopped once detainees signed a confession – even in cases when the interviewed detainees did not understand or could not read what was written in the confession.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Rafad Al Hussein, has spoken out against torture of detainees, saying that confessions produced in this matter are totally unreliable.

People will say anything to stop the pain, Mr. Zeid said.

He called for proper monitoring of detention facilities in Afghanistan and meaningful investigations to ensure that those accused of torture are brought to trial and held accountable.

Ensuring accountability for such acts sends a strong message and helps to prevent future violations, he added.

The report does commend the Government, however, for implementing its National Plan on the Elimination of Torture.

If the proposed legislative changes are adopted, Afghanistan would formally recognize the UN Committee against Torture to conduct in-country visits to detention centres and establish an independent monitoring body to visit the sites, according to the report.

Among other recommendations, the report urges Afghan authorities to provide access for victims of torture to effective legal remedy and reparation for harm suffered.

Ahead of World Malaria Day, UN says 'let's close the gap' in prevention coverage

24 April 2017 – On the eve of World Malaria Day, the United Nations health agency called today for accelerating scaled-up efforts to prevent malaria, which remains a major public health threat, killing one child every two minutes worldwide in 2015.

The UN World Health Organization's (WHO) latest report, [Malaria prevention](#)

[works: Let's close the gap](#), spotlights critical gaps in prevention coverage, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

WHO-recommended tools have made a measurable difference in the global malaria fight, but we need a much bigger push for prevention especially in Africa, which bears the greatest burden of malaria, [said](#) WHO Director-General Margaret Chan.

WHO said that since 2001, more than 663 million cases have been averted in sub-Saharan Africa, which shoulders 90 per cent of the global [malaria](#) burden. Insecticide-treated nets have had the greatest impact, accounting for an estimated 69 per cent of cases prevented through control tools.

However, WHO estimates that 43 per cent of people at risk of malaria in the region were not protected by either an insecticide-treated net or indoor insecticide spraying in 2015. About 69 per cent of pregnant women in 20 African countries did not have access to the recommended three or more doses of preventive treatment.

Malaria: Facts, figures and prevention strategies

According to the most recent [World Malaria Report](#), the global tally of malaria reached 429,000 malaria deaths and 212 million new cases in 2015. The rate of new malaria cases fell by 21 per cent globally between 2010 and 2015, and malaria death rates fell by 29 per cent in the same period. In sub-Saharan Africa, case incidence and death rates fell by 21 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively.

Together with diagnosis and treatment, WHO recommends a package of proven prevention approaches, including insecticide treated nets, spraying indoor walls with insecticides, and preventive medicines for the most vulnerable groups, such as pregnant women and children under the age of five.

Across the Sahel, where most malaria cases and deaths among children occur in the rainy season, WHO recommends seasonal malaria chemoprevention a preventive therapy shown to reduce new cases of severe malaria in young children by roughly 75 per cent. As of 2015, 10 countries Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo had adopted the preventative therapy and begun implementing it.

Any death from malaria a preventable and treatable disease is simply unacceptable, [said](#) Pedro Alonso, Director of WHO's Global Malaria Programme. Today we are urging countries and partners to accelerate the pace of action, especially in low-income countries with a high malaria burden.

Ninety-one countries reported ongoing malaria transmission in 2015; all are working to reduce their malaria burden through the deployment and use of WHO-recommended preventive, diagnostic and treatment tools.

In recent years, seven countries have been certified as having eliminated malaria: United Arab Emirates (2007), Morocco (2010), Turkmenistan (2010), Armenia (2011), Maldives (2015), Sri Lanka (2016) and Kyrgyzstan (2016). This

certification is granted by WHO when countries achieve at least three consecutive years of zero locally-acquired cases of malaria.

WHO said future progress in the fight to prevent malaria will likely be shaped by technological advances and innovations in new tools, including new vector control interventions, and possibly a vaccine.

[World Malaria Day](#) falls in [World Immunization Week](#), 24-30 April, which celebrates the widespread use of vaccines that protect people against 26 diseases. Overall, vaccines prevent an estimated two to three million deaths each year.