

Paraguay's elimination of malaria 'shows what is possible' – UN health agency

Paraguay has successfully eliminated malaria, the United Nations health agency has announced, highlighting that the major milestone offers lessons to other countries aiming to control the mosquito-borne sickness.

According to the UN [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), the “[incredible achievement](#)” makes Paraguay the first country in the Americas in almost 45 years to wipe out the disease. Cuba was the last country in the region to eliminate malaria, in 1973.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of WHO, [attributed](#) the success to three key factors, the first of which was Paraguay's focus on tracking the disease and preventing outbreaks, not just treating cases.

“Second, a network of committed health staff and community volunteers ensured no one was left behind in getting universal access to primary health care,” he continued.

Also vital was the “unwavering commitment and leadership” at all levels, to keep malaria control efforts on track, added the head of WHO.

However, in spite of the success in Paraguay and in other countries, malaria remains a major health concern. In 2016, the disease resulted in 216 million cases worldwide and claimed 445,000 lives.

Mr. Tedros urged continued vigilance against the disease, noting that success in Paraguay “shows what is possible.”

“It gives us hope that if malaria can be eliminated in one country, it can be eliminated in all countries.”

The end of malaria in Paraguay

According to WHO, between 1950-2011, Paraguay systematically developed policies and programmes to control and eliminate the disease, a significant public health challenge for a country that reported more than 80,000 cases in the 1940s.

As a result, the South American country recorded its last case of *Plasmodium falciparum* malaria in 1995, and *P. vivax* malaria, in 2011.

In 2011, a five-year plan was launched to consolidate the gains, prevent re-establishment of transmission and prepare for elimination certification, said WHO.

Continued efforts against malaria identified Paraguay in 2016, as one of 21 countries with the potential to eliminate malaria by 2020, and receive support under WHO's E-2020 initiative.

Other countries on the list being supported through the E-2020 initiative, include Belize, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico and Suriname.

Malaria: Symptoms and prevention

Malaria is a [life-threatening disease](#) caused by parasites (*P. falciparum*, *P. malariae*, *P. ovale* and *P. vivax*) that are transmitted to people through the bites of infected female *Anopheles* mosquitoes.

According to WHO, it takes between 10 and 15 days for symptoms to appear, after being infected.

The first symptoms – fever, headache, and chills – may be mild and difficult to recognize as malaria. If not treated within 24 hours, *P. falciparum* malaria can progress to severe illness, often leading to death.

Vector control is the main way to prevent and reduce malaria transmission.

WHO recommends protection for all people at risk of malaria with effective malaria vector control. Two forms of vector control – insecticide-treated mosquito nets and indoor residual spraying – have proven to be highly effective at preventing transmission.

Antimalarial medicines (chemoprophylaxis; or sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine for pregnant women) can also be used to prevent malaria.

[From the field – Rehabilitating lives in Tanzania](#)

A 15-year old girl from the East African country, Tanzania, says an operation to correct a facial disability means that she can “look forward to a future when I am not laughed at.”

Agnes was born with a cleft lip, a birth defect that occurs when a baby's lip or mouth does not form properly. She was abandoned by her father and her mother was unable to find the right care for her.

It was a chance introduction to the CCBRT hospital in Tanzania's commercial capital, Dar es Salaam, which specializes in disability rehabilitation, which led to her life-changing operation.

The international community is gathering at the United Nations in New York to

discuss the challenges faced by women and girls like Agnes at meeting focusing on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

To read more about Agnes' story and how other people with disabilities are being treated in Tanzania, click here:

<https://undp.shorthandstories.com/gef-sgp-changing-lives>

[UN humanitarian coordinators 'stepped up to the challenge' of complex emergencies: 2017 report](#)

The United Nations office that coordinates the global institution's humanitarian work, successfully tackled the four most complex emergencies it was confronted with last year, according to its annual report released on Monday.

At the beginning of 2017, more than 128 million people needed humanitarian assistance in 33 countries. By the end of the year, that number had risen to 141 million, according to the [report](#) issued by the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA).

"2017 was marked by record humanitarian need due to protracted complex crises, the escalation of conflict in several countries, climate change-induced vulnerability and a series of natural disasters," said UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock in the foreword of the report.

OCHA was requesting \$22.2 billion in support – the largest humanitarian appeal ever launched, and "stepped up to the challenge", helping to provide for the vulnerable and protect them in the face of famine, disease, hurricanes, conflicts and other disasters, the report said.

Humanitarians dealt with four so-called 'Level 3' emergencies last year; in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

Level 3 indicates the most complex and challenging emergencies, which require the highest level of mobilization across the humanitarian system, to ensure the right capacities and systems are in place to effectively meet needs.

For instance, the report noted that intensive planning went into preparing for the humanitarian consequences of the military campaign to retake Mosul from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) extremist group, in Iraq.

"The military campaign displaced one million people, which exceeded our

worst-case planning scenarios, but humanitarian operations still kept pace with needs,” the report said.

Humanitarians also dealt with four ‘Corporate’ emergencies, which are rapid-onset or rapidly escalating crises requiring OCHA’s highest level of response, namely the situations in Ethiopia, Nigeria and Somalia as well as the Rohingya crisis.

The humanitarian community’s ability to massively scale-up its response, was tested when violence and persecution against members of the Rohingya community in Myanmar caused the rapid flight of 860,000 people to neighbouring Bangladesh.

“OCHA raised awareness of the plight of the refugees and the remaining Rohingya in Rakhine State, and we very quickly organized, together with other UN partners and donors, a high-level pledging event that raised \$360 million,” the report said.

The report also noted that OCHA’s and partners’ efforts, with strong support from generous donors, helped avert famine that threatened 20 million people in north-east Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

[US-North Korea summit in Singapore ‘a promising development’ says Guterres](#)

The summit that is due to begin shortly between the leaders of the United States and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) is “a promising development for global peace and security,” [United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said on Monday.

US President Donald Trump and his North Korean counterpart Kim Jong-un are due to meet in Singapore on Tuesday morning: the first-ever face-to-face encounter between a sitting US President and a North Korean leader.

As the UN chief stated, the world is watching.

“The two leaders are seeking to break out of the dangerous cycle that created so much concern last year,” Mr. Guterres told journalists at UN Headquarters in New York, referring to escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

“Peace and verifiable denuclearization must remain the clear and shared goal. As I wrote to both leaders last month, the road ahead will require cooperation, compromise and a common cause.”

Mr. Guterres added that UN agencies stand at the ready to support this process.

Among them are the International Atomic Energy Agency ([IAEA](#)), which works for the safe, secure and peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology.

He recalled that the agency has a mandate “to apply safeguards on all nuclear material in peaceful use, including all material removed from military programmes.”

Furthermore, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty Organization ([CTBTO](#)) could also play a role in monitoring the DPRK’s moratorium on nuclear tests, he added.

“I believe that this summit is an extremely important event,” said the UN chief, taking questions from reporters. “I believe the two leaders need to be credited for the courage with which they decided to move forward with the summit and to engage in a constructive negotiation to reach an objective that is vital for us all: the peaceful and verifiable denuclearization of North Korea,” he added.

Last December, the then head of the UN’s Department of Political Affairs travelled to North Korea for talks with senior officials.

Jeffrey Feltman said he had stressed the international community’s commitment to a peaceful political solution to the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

Speaking to reporters after returning to New York, he described the visit as “the most important mission I’ve ever undertaken,” adding that “we’ve left the door ajar, and I fervently hope that the door to a negotiated solution will now be opened wide.”

Last year, as North Korea carried out further nuclear weapons and ballistic missile tests, since conducting its first nuclear test in 2006, the UN Security Council adopted several resolutions condemning the launches and toughening sanctions against DPRK.

In December, the Council also held its fourth meeting on the human rights situation in the country.

During his remarks to journalists on Monday, the Secretary-General also drew attention to the humanitarian situation in North Korea, where the UN estimates more than 10 million people, or 40 per cent of the population, require assistance.

Aid agencies are seeking [\\$111 million](#) to assist six million in need this year.

The funding will support operations in areas such as enhancing food security, reducing malnutrition, and increasing access to healthcare, water and sanitation services.

Communities will also receive help to become more resilient in the face of recurrent natural hazards such as droughts and floods.

Among the UN agencies active in the country are the [World Food Programme](#)

([WFP](#)): a presence for more than two decades.

The UN agency aims to assist 650,000 women and children there every month, who are being given dietary supplements in the form of fortified cereals and biscuits.

WFP Executive Director David Beasley was in North Korea last month to assess needs and evaluate operations on the ground.

Mr. Beasley visited several projects including a WFP-supported children's nursery and a local factory where WFP produces the fortified biscuits for its programmes.

"There is a real need for continued humanitarian assistance, especially when it comes to meeting the nutritional needs of mothers and young children," he [said](#) at the end of the four-day mission.

"I do believe that with hard work and support from around the world we'll be able to make a difference."

['Highly explosive' escalation of conflict and displacement across Syria's Idlib, says top UN official](#)

The situation inside Syria's Idlib threatens to become "highly explosive" amid an uptick in conflict between armed groups and a spike in the number of people displaced inside the war-torn country, a top UN aid official said on Monday.

Panos Moutzis, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the [Syria Crisis](#), told journalists in Geneva that 1.2 million of the governorate's more than 2.5 million population are now displaced; many of them multiple times.

The situation was "heartbreaking" and complicated by the fact that Idlib has become a haven for belligerents forced out of former strongholds by government forces and their allies, said the UN official.

He told journalists in Geneva that every part of Idlib had been in constant upheaval with fresh waves of fighters being forced to seek refuge there.

"We have seen in the last few weeks an escalation of even fighting between these groups that has taken place," he said, noting that fighting had been occurring around health facilities and other civilian areas.

“A special solution needs to be found for all these groups inside Idlib, because the current composition makes it highly explosive.”

The first four months of the year have seen more than 900,000 people flee their homes inside Syria.

This is “the highest displacement number since the conflict started”, Mr. Moumtzis said, adding that eight in 10 people had come from Rural Damascus and Afrin in the north, while others had been displaced within Idlib governorate itself.

Across Syria, more than two million people are in so-called hard-to-reach areas and around 11,000 are still under siege in three opposition-controlled locations.

Some 6.2 million people are internally displaced and a further 5.6 million have fled the country amid ongoing conflict that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and destroyed basic infrastructure.

Response to the seven-year conflict ‘at a breaking point’

With the \$1.8 billion appeal for Syria only 26 per cent funded, the UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator said on Monday that the international response to the seven-year conflict was “really at a breaking point”.

The shortage of funding meant that aid teams could not deliver “basic life-saving” aid where it was needed, despite having full access to areas such as Idlib, Mr. Moumtzis added, while calling for pledges made at a recent EU-hosted conference in Brussels, Belgium, to be disbursed promptly.

In an appeal for the belligerents – and international Member States with responsibility for preventing an escalation of conflict – the UN official stressed that every effort needed to be made to prevent the situation in Idlib deteriorating further and turning into a repeat of the devastation experienced in East Aleppo and East Ghouta:

Across the governorate, he said, “protection of civilians is of major concern, in particular given the composition; given the fact that there is a sizeable number of women, children, families living there.”