

# Open Letter to G7 Heads of State on Neglected Tropical Diseases

March 4, 2015

To: Chancellor Angela Merkel, Federal Republic of Germany, President of the 2015 G7  
Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, Japan  
Prime Minister David Cameron, United Kingdom  
Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Canada  
President François Hollande, Republic of France  
President Barack Obama, United States of America  
Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, Republic of Italy

Cc: G7 Foreign Ministers and G7 Sherpas

Your Excellencies:

Ahead of the 2015 G7 Summit, we would like to applaud G7 leaders for putting global health, particularly neglected and poverty-related diseases, at the forefront of the G7's development agenda this year.

Together, we represent a group of experts, advocates, researchers and implementing partners from public and private sector organizations that share a vision of a world free of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs).<sup>1</sup> Our work is underpinned by the landmark 2012 London Declaration on NTDs, which captures our commitment to accelerate progress towards the World Health Organization's (WHO) 2020 control and elimination targets. We are writing to urge you to sustain current funding levels for NTD control and elimination efforts, and implement a collective plan of action to fill the remaining gaps to ensure we reach all people at risk from NTDs.

These bacterial, viral and parasitic infections, which affect the health and economic futures of nearly 1.9 billion people across Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia, thrive in communities that lack access to health services, adequate sanitation and clean water. These infections can cause blindness, crippling physical disfigurements and increased susceptibility to HIV, exposing people to social stigma and discrimination. Without treatment, children face stunted growth and cognitive delays, posing a serious threat to their education. Moreover, there are approximately 44 million pregnant women infected with hookworms who are more likely to suffer from anemia and deliver low birthweight newborns – putting both mothers and babies at risk of mortality.

These detrimental health consequences have a spillover effect on the economic progress of families and communities, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. In short, these diseases are inextricably linked to maternal, newborn and child health; poverty; and inequality, requiring a comprehensive, holistic solution.

We enthusiastically welcome the G7's leadership on NTDs this year, which builds on the G7's longstanding commitments to tackle this problem, notably the historic Hashimoto Initiative, the first international parasitic disease control initiative, established during the 1998 Birmingham Summit. This paved the way for the G7's ongoing support for research and diagnostics, in addition to treatment and prevention efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> The World Health Organization lists 17 neglected tropical diseases: Dengue, rabies, blinding trachoma, Buruli ulcer, endemic treponematoses (yaws), leprosy (Hansen disease), Chagas disease, human African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness), leishmaniasis, cysticercosis, dracunculiasis (guinea-worm disease), echinococcosis, foodborne trematode infections, lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis (river blindness), schistosomiasis (bilharziasis), soil-transmitted helminthiasis (intestinal worms). The WHO recommends an integrated approach to overcoming the global impact of NTDs through five interventions: innovative and intensified disease management; preventive chemotherapy; vector ecology and management; veterinary public-health services; and the provision of safe water, sanitation and hygiene. [Investing to Overcome the Global Impact of Neglected Tropical Diseases: Third WHO Report on neglected tropical diseases, 2015.](#)

Major pharmaceutical companies have established a superb track record of leadership in the effort to control and eliminate NTDs, donating 2.5 billion treatments in 2012 and 2013 alone. Partners are working tirelessly to make sure that these treatments reach the people who need them, alongside over 70 endemic countries that have demonstrated ownership of this issue by developing dedicated, integrated plans to fight NTDs.

These are all steps in the right direction, however a \$220 million global annual funding gap for treatment continues to stand in the way of reaching the WHO 2020 targets. We urge the G7 to scale up investments now to ensure that programs are able to reach all affected populations, while also sustaining progress made thus far. Looking forward, the G7 and partners should ensure universal coverage against these diseases, an effort that will lead to measurable progress towards the elimination of extreme poverty; improved maternal and child health outcomes; and enhanced economic growth. Equally important, prioritizing NTDs will set the stage for success in achieving the proposed 2030 sustainable development goals.

**To meet this need, the G7 should sustain current funding levels for neglected tropical disease control and elimination efforts, and implement a collective plan of action to fill the remaining gaps:**

- **Scale up access to existing treatments through mass drug administration and multisectoral approaches:** Currently, just over 40 percent of people at risk of NTDs worldwide are being reached by treatment programs. Therefore, additional investment is essential to ensure coverage of those affected. G7 leaders can advance progress towards their [2008 Hokkaido Toyako commitment](#) by reaching 75% of the people affected by NTDs through cost-effective, integrated approaches like mass drug administration – a bundled packet of NTD treatments that can be delivered through community-based platforms, including schools. In addition, the G7 should invest in multisectoral approaches that integrate NTD control and elimination activities alongside efforts to improve maternal and child health, education, water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition, reaching more people in need with a greater impact.
- **Invest in new, innovative technologies and approaches:** While we must continue to utilize these cost-effective, high-impact treatments, some NTDs require increased investment in new innovative technologies including drugs, diagnostics, vaccines and pesticides. One possible avenue for research and development support is through product development partnerships that can facilitate exchange of expertise and scientific knowledge to develop products for diseases that disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations.

Yours respectfully,

**Aeras**

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