

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

What Can the United States of America Do to Help Combat Diseases Around the World?

Dear President Bush,

The United States is not immune or isolated from the challenges faced by the global community. Among the many types of challenges, disease and illness have always been prevalent, but never has the toll been larger than at present. In late 2000, after it had killed approximately 22 million people worldwide, AIDS was realized as the worst epidemic in history.ⁱ To tackle the growth of this problem, the General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration that same year,ⁱⁱ including Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Six that asks the world to “halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS...[and] the incidence of malaria and other major diseases”ⁱⁱⁱ by the year 2015.^{iv}

Although progress has been made, at the current rate of work, the likelihood of achieving this MDG by 2015 remains questionable.^v In 2007, the number of people living with HIV was the highest ever, reaching a total of 33.2 million.^{vi} Each day, over 6,800 people become infected with HIV and over 5,700 people die from AIDS,^{vii} while more people die from AIDS and malaria in Africa every month than the number of people that died during the 2004 Asia-Pacific tsunami.^{viii} Meanwhile, endangering 106 nations, threatening half of the world’s population, and affecting more people than ever before, malaria has worsened to a rate where the annual number of deaths is double that of a generation ago.^{ix} In Africa, it kills one child every 30 seconds,^x and creates a loss of

\$12 billion in economic growth each year.^{xi} As important as it is to address these startling statistics, it is also imperative to understand the major barriers that have made it difficult to produce progress.

Many problems have been encountered when aiming to treat people with HIV/AIDS. Antiretroviral (ARV) drugs, which block the action of HIV related viruses and transform the condition from “a death sentence into [a] chronic but apparently stable condition,”^{xii} must be treated with adherence, taking the drugs exactly as prescribed.^{xiii} However, in many countries like Tanzania, Botswana, and Uganda, discrimination of HIV-positive people has resulted in some ARV users losing their jobs, being abused or abandoned by their partners, or being isolated by the community.^{xiv} Out of fear of such treatment, many ARV users hide their medical status, resulting in insufficient ARV use. Adherence is also hindered when the transport costs of ARV drugs are too high or treatment clinics are too far from one’s residence.^{xv}

Likewise, other obstacles must be overcome in order to fight malaria. Often times, many patients in malaria-prone areas visit traditional healers and put faith in myths associated with malaria. In an effort to eradicate such false ideas, a poster in Zambia reads: “Malaria is not transmitted by witchcraft, drinking dirty water, getting soaked in rain, or chewing immature sugarcane.”^{xvi} Moreover, the accumulation of drug resistance has caused the cheapest and most popular antimalarial drug, Chloroquine, to lose its effectiveness for many areas. Even though new, more efficient drugs are under way, the costs are extremely expensive and out of reach of many poorer households.^{xvii}

Tuberculosis (TB) is another disease that continuously spreads throughout poor regions, mainly because of malnutrition and lack of medical care.^{xviii} Additionally, those

who are HIV-positive and have latent TB infection (inactive bacteria) have a weakened immune system that will highly increase the risk of transforming their condition into active TB disease (active bacteria).^{xix} In fact, the correlation between HIV/AIDS and TB is so strong that TB accounts for about one third of all AIDS deaths worldwide.^{xx}

The global impacts of the diseases specified in MDG Six also cannot be overlooked. To begin, the different factors that contribute to its spread make the AIDS/HIV epidemic a threat to society everywhere. Regions like China, Russia, and the Caribbean are all victims to the AIDS/HIV crisis,^{xxi} and in Vietnam, the number of people living with HIV has doubled from 2000 to 2005.^{xxii} Over two thirds of all HIV-positive people live in Sub-Saharan Africa, while greater than three quarters of all AIDS deaths in 2007 happened in the region.^{xxiii} Meanwhile, the United States “is one of the countries with the largest number of HIV infections in the world,”^{xxiv} and is certainly no exception to the crisis.

Similarly, malaria may become more widely distributed throughout the world because of environmental concerns. As the air becomes warmer due to global warming, mosquitoes reproduce faster and bite more, bringing illness with them into new areas.^{xxv} Nearly all scientists currently agree that the temperature of the world is accelerating,^{xxvi} and this only further confirms the potential expansion of malaria.

Lastly, a threat that exists for any disease is the ease with which the contagion can reach even the most advanced nations. In the modern world where international travel and commerce are a vital part of everyday life, a sickness that exists in one part of the world can quickly become a problem elsewhere.^{xxvii} It is only too clear that the U.S.

must be responsible for not only helping others in developing countries, but also ensuring the safety of its own citizens by working to tackle this worldwide problem.

In order to achieve Millennium Development Goal Six by 2015, the U.S. must work with the global community to fund committed programs, help assess the effectiveness of funding in afflicted countries, and work with scientists in developing areas to research a cure to the diseases.

First, the U.S. needs to guide the international community in funding programs. Since 2004, through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a five-year plan that was installed in order to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria,^{xxviii} the U.S. has contributed \$18.8 billion to extinguish disease.^{xxix} Now it is time for the U.S. to bring the efforts to the global scale by leading other countries in an innovative fundraising approach. Because most countries rely on international trade for much of their profits, a great portion of the world is actively engaged in the global market. By putting a small "worldwide tax" on all products exported by companies and businesses that are part of the international trade industry, the taxes can be used as funds for combating diseases. In a similar manner to how the U.S. uses a portion of taxes to fund Medicaid, the whole world should be active in involving the concept of a "United Nations" to create a united system of raising funds for the needy around the world. When a mere 0.1% of the world merchandise export total of \$8.257 trillion is taxed,^{xxx} \$8.3 billion is yielded. Because the Global Fund needs about \$8 billion to \$10 billion in order to significantly impact the MDG by 2015,^{xxxi} the \$8.3 billion when collected as international tax, can be greatly effective towards funding.

Second, the U.S. must act as a strong advocate for rigorous evaluation of the nations receiving aid and the programs that are giving it. For example, routine assessment programs like the Malaria Indicator Survey “monitor progress...maintain momentum, focus efforts[,] and extract maximum advantage from available resources.”^{xxxii} By evaluating regions, it will be possible to determine the countries that are progressing and using strong political leadership to take care of their epidemic crises, and to these nations extra funding or other incentives can be given. Such assessments should be made openly accessible and transparent, which will help eliminate mismanagement of funds and further secure the need for honest and precise documentations of progress towards MDG Six.

Lastly, the U.S. should recognize the significance of fundamental scientific research in solving a health problem. By bringing scientific knowledge and involvement in research to scientists from countries troubled by disease, those individuals will be able to bring back the medical care to their people on a more national level, prompting effectiveness in curing diseases. Moreover, when afflicted countries are encouraged to become involved in finding effective drugs that can be made available at low costs, or vaccines that can speed up the elimination of disease, self-sustainability is promoted for those countries. By prompting international collaboration in opening up and sharing such research, a more permanent solution to the underlying problem of the diseases can be found.

Mankind has always been exposed to and felt the consequences of disease, but at the same time, mankind has also always been able to conquer it. For instance, the elimination of smallpox in 1977 through vaccination programs^{xxxiii} was one way in which

the world found solutions in the past. At present, we have identified today's most serious health threats to the world and created Millennium Development Goal Six because we understand the seriousness of the epidemics. Finally, since disease has always been a part of the human species,^{xxxiv} new illnesses will rise again in the future. By following the three steps detailed in the aforementioned plan, a healthier world will not only be felt now, but the approach can also serve as a model for conquering other diseases and making certain that coming generations will appreciate the efforts of this endeavor in the future.

Sincerely,

Janet Eom

Endnotes

ⁱ Talbot, Chris. "United Nations AIDS Report Confirms Worst Epidemic in History." World Socialist Web Site. 4 Dec. 2000. <<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/dec2000/aids-d04.shtml>>.

ⁱⁱ "United Nations Millennium Declaration," Resolution 55/2 Adopted by the General Assembly, September 18, 2000. <www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "The UN Millennium Development Goals." UN Millennium Development Goals. <<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/goals.html>>.

^{iv} "The Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations Role." UN Millennium Development Goals. Oct. 2002. <<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/MDGs-FACTSHEET1.pdf>>.

^v Part One: Report of the Seminar. United Nations. <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/PopAspectsMDG/PART%20ONE_Report.pdf>.

^{vi} "07 AIDS Epidemic Update." UNAIDS. Dec. 2007. <http://data.unaids.org/pub/EPISlides/2007/2007_epiupdate_en.pdf>.

- vii *Ibid.*
- viii "HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria." DATA. <<http://www.data.org/node/64/print>>.
- ix Finkel, Michael. "Bedlam in the Blood Malaria." National Geographic July 2007: 32-67.
- x *Ibid.*
- xi "HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria." DATA. <<http://www.data.org/node/64/print>>.
- xii "Q&A: Antiretroviral Drugs." BBC News 24 Oct. 2003.
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3210669.stm>>.
- xiii Kanabus, Annabel, and Rob Noble. "AIDS & HIV Antiretroviral Drug Treatment in Resource Poor Communities." AVERT. 12 Sept. 2007. <<http://www.avert.org/aidstreatment.htm>>.
- xiv Hardon, Anita, Sheila Davey, Trudie Gerrits, Catherine Hodgkin, Henry Irunde, Joyce Kgatlwane, John Kinsman, Alice Nakiyemba, and Richard Laing. From Access to Adherence: the Challenges of Antiretroviral Treatment. World Health Organization. 2006.
<<http://www.who.int/medicinedocs/collect/medicinedocs/pdf/s13400e/s13400e.pdf>>.
- xv *Ibid.*
- xvi Finkel, Michael. "Bedlam in the Blood Malaria." National Geographic July 2007: 32-67.
- xvii 2005 World Malaria Report. 2005. <http://www.rbm.who.int/wmr2005/pdf/adv_e.pdf>.
- xviii Progress Towards the Millennium Development Goals, 1990-2005. 2005.
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/goals_2005/goal_6.pdf>.
- xix "TB and HIV Coinfection 2005." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 18 Apr. 2007.
<http://www.cdc.gov/tb/pubs/TB_HIVcoinfection/default.htm>.
- xx "JOINT HIV/TUBERCULOSIS INTERVENTIONS." World Health Organization.
<<http://www.who.int/hiv/topics/tb/tuberculosis/en/>>.
- xxi "07 AIDS Epidemic Update." UNAIDS. Dec. 2007.
<http://data.unaids.org/pub/EPISlides/2007/2007_epiupdate_en.pdf>.
- xxii *Ibid.*
- xxiii *Ibid.*
- xxiv *Ibid.*
- xxv Epstein, Paul R. "Is Global Warming Harmful to Health?" Scientific American 20 Aug. 2000.
<<http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=0008C7B2-E060-1C73-9B81809EC588EF21&print=true>>.
- xxvi *Ibid.*
- xxvii *Ibid.*
- xxviii Salaam-Blyther, Tiaji. U.S. International HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Spending: FY2004-FY2008. 2007. <<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL33485.pdf>>.
- xxix "Making a Difference: Funding." The United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. <<http://www.pepfar.gov/>>.
- xxx "Table II.1." World Trade Organization.
<http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/its2007_e/its07_merch_trade_product_e.htm>.
- xxxi Low-Ber, Daniel, Perna Banati, and Ryuichi Komatsu. Partners in Impact. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. 2007.
<<http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/files/about/replenishment/oslo/Progress%20Report.pdf>>.
- xxxii 2005 World Malaria Report. 2005. <http://www.rbm.who.int/wmr2005/pdf/adv_e.pdf>.
- xxxiii "Smallpox Disease Overview." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 30 Dec. 2004.
<<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox/overview/disease-facts.asp>>.
- xxxiv Finkel, Michael. "Bedlam in the Blood Malaria." National Geographic July 2007: 32-67.

Works Cited

- "07 AIDS Epidemic Update." UNAIDS. Dec. 2007.
<http://data.unaids.org/pub/EPISlides/2007/2007_epiupdate_en.pdf>.
- 2005 World Malaria Report. 2005. <http://www.rbm.who.int/wmr2005/pdf/adv_e.pdf>.
- Epstein, Paul R. "Is Global Warming Harmful to Health?" Scientific American 20 Aug. 2000.
<<http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=0008C7B2-E060-1C73-9B81809EC588EF21&print=true>>.
- Finkel, Michael. "Bedlam in the Blood Malaria." National Geographic July 2007: 32-67.
- Hardon, Anita, Sheila Davey, Trudie Gerrits, Catherine Hodgkin, Henry Irunde, Joyce Kgatlwane, John Kinsman, Alice Nakiyemba, and Richard Laing. From Access to Adherence: the Challenges of Antiretroviral Treatment. World Health Organization. 2006.
<<http://www.who.int/medicinedocs/collect/medicinedocs/pdf/s13400e/s13400e.pdf>>.
- "HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria." DATA. <<http://www.data.org/node/64/print>>.
- "JOINT HIV/TUBERCULOSIS INTERVENTIONS." World Health Organization.
<<http://www.who.int/hiv/topics/tb/tuberculosis/en/>>.
- Kanabus, Annabel, and Rob Noble. "AIDS & HIV Antiretroviral Drug Treatment in Resource Poor Communities." AVERT. 12 Sept. 2007. <<http://www.avert.org/aidstreatment.htm>>.
- Low-Beer, Daniel, Perna Banati, and Ryuichi Komatsu. Partners in Impact. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. 2007.
<<http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/files/about/replenishment/oslo/Progress%20Report.pdf>>.
- "Making a Difference: Funding." The United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.
<<http://www.pepfar.gov/>>.
- Part One: Report of the Seminar on the Relevance of Population Aspects for the Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals held at United Nations Headquarters in New York. November 2007. United Nations.
<http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/PopAspectsMDG/PART%20ONE_Report.pdf>.
- Progress Towards the Millennium Development Goals, 1990-2005. 2005.
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/goals_2005/goal_6.pdf>.
- "Q&A: Antiretroviral Drugs." BBC News 24 Oct. 2003.
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3210669.stm>>.
- Salaam-Blyther, Tiaji. U.S. International HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Spending: FY2004-FY2008. 2007. <<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL33485.pdf>>.
- "Smallpox Disease Overview." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 30 Dec. 2004.
<<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox/overview/disease-facts.asp>>.
- "Table II.1." World Trade Organization.
<http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/its2007_e/its07_merch_trade_product_e.htm>.
- Talbot, Chris. "United Nations AIDS Report Confirms Worst Epidemic in History." World Socialist Web Site. 4 Dec. 2000. <<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/dec2000/aids-d04.shtml>>.
- "TB and HIV Coinfection 2005." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 18 Apr. 2007.
<http://www.cdc.gov/tb/pubs/TB_HIVcoinfection/default.htm>.
- "The Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations Role." UN Millennium Development Goals. Oct. 2002. <<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/MDGs-FACTSHEET1.pdf>>.
- "The UN Millennium Development Goals." UN Millennium Development Goals.
<<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/goals.html>>.

“United Nations Millennium Declaration,” Resolution 55/2 Adopted by the General Assembly,
September 18, 2000. <www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>.