GENEVA, 12 November 2013 – Pneumonia remains the single biggest killer of children under five globally, claiming the lives of more than one million girls and boys every year. But pneumonia deaths are preventable.

As countries mark World Pneumonia Day on 12 November, the GAVI Alliance, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) are highlighting essential actions that can help end child deaths from this disease.

“Every 30 seconds, a child younger than five dies of pneumonia. This is a great shame as we know what it takes to prevent children from dying of this illness,” says Dr Mickey Chopra, Chief of Health, UNICEF. “Tackling pneumonia doesn’t necessarily need complicated solutions.”

Many factors contribute to pneumonia, and no single intervention can effectively prevent, treat and control it. Five simple but effective interventions, if implemented properly, will help reduce the burden of the disease that is responsible for almost one fifth of all child deaths around the world.

These are:

- Exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months and continued breastfeeding complemented by nutritious solid foods up to age 2;
- Vaccination against whooping cough (pertussis), measles, *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib) and pneumococcus;
- Safe drinking water, sanitation and handwashing facilities;
- Improved cooking stoves to reduce indoor air pollution;
- Treatment, including amoxicillin dispersible tablets and oxygen;

The theme of World Pneumonia Day 2013 is “Innovate to End Child Pneumonia”. Recognizing that child mortality cannot be addressed in a vacuum, but only through integrated efforts, in April 2013, WHO and UNICEF released an Integrated Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Pneumonia and Diarrhoea (GAPPD).

The GAPPD presents an innovative framework bringing together prevention, protection and control of both pneumonia and diarrhoea – two of the world’s leading killers of children under 5 - to make more efficient and effective use of scarce health resources.

To mark 5th World Pneumonia Day, Mauritania and Papua New Guinea are today introducing the pneumococcal vaccine, which protects against one of the leading causes of pneumonia. With support from the GAVI Alliance, more than 50 countries will introduce this vaccine by 2015.

“The GAVI Alliance is helping to accelerate the fight against pneumonia by increasing access to pneumococcal vaccines, thanks to GAVI’s innovative Advance Market Commitment (AMC),

but also to the five-in-one pentavalent vaccine which protects against *Haemophilus influenzae* type b, another major cause of pneumonia," says Dr Seth Berkley, CEO of the GAVI Alliance.

Since the launch of the GAPPD seven months ago, several countries have taken this forward. For example, Bangladesh and Zambia are translating the GAPPD into local implementation plans in some districts. Programme managers responsible for immunisation, child health, nutrition and water and sanitation have joined forces to accelerate progress and eliminate preventable deaths from pneumonia and diarrhoea.

In addition, in October 2013, WHO published new technical advice for countries:

- Based on a review of the latest evidence, guidelines on the treatment of pneumonia were updated, recommending simpler antibiotic regimens.
- A handbook to guide district and health facility staff on how to introduce the pneumococcal vaccine emphasizes using new vaccine introductions to scale up access to other essential interventions to protect, prevent and treat pneumonia, in line with the GAPPD.

"To achieve the vision and goals of the integrated plan—to end preventable deaths from pneumonia and diarrhoea in the next generation—the children of the world need to see political will, coordinated efforts, and increased resources at the global and national levels to fight these stubborn killers," says Dr Elizabeth Mason, Director of WHO's Department of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health.