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Geneva - 16 January 2013 –The World Health Organization (WHO) reports **unprecedented progress against 17 neglected tropical diseases**
*, thanks to a new global strategy, a regular supply of quality assured, cost-effective medicines and support from global partners. The report
Sustaining the drive to overcome the global impact of neglected tropical diseases
reveals new momentum has shifted the world closer to the elimination of many of these conditions that take their greatest toll amongst the poor.

The publication charts progress in controlling, eliminating and eradicating these diseases. Two are targeted for global eradication, dracunculiasis (guinea worm disease) in 2015 and yaws in 2020. The report outlines six targets set for the elimination of five diseases in 2015 and a further 10 targets for nine diseases for 2020, either globally or in selected geographical areas.

“With this new phase in the control of these diseases, we are moving ahead towards achieving universal health coverage with essential interventions,” says Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of WHO. “The challenge now is to strengthen capacity of national disease programmes in endemic countries and streamline supply chains to get the drugs to the people who need them, when they need them.”

Donation of medicines and funding through an alignment of international partners have helped fast-track actions and initiatives that are now having a measurable impact in affected countries with considerable scale-up of preventive chemotherapy interventions. This involves the widespread delivery of safe, single-dose, quality-assured medicines as preventive treatment against five anthelminthic (worm) diseases and trachoma (chlamydial infection).

In 2010 alone, 711 million people received treatment for at least one of the four diseases (lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis and soil-transmitted helminthiases) targeted for preventive chemotherapy, which involves the widespread delivery of safe, single-dose, quality-assured medicines as preventive treatment.

Over the next five years, WHO projects that treatment for schistosomiasis (bilharzia) will reach 235 million people. This will be achieved by increasing availability of medicines by using donated medicines and improved distribution at country level.

“The prospects for success have never been so strong,” adds Dr Chan. “Many millions of people are being freed from the misery and disability that have kept populations mired in poverty, generation after generation, for centuries.”

Other highlights of the report include:

- Eradication of guinea worm is in sight. WHO reports a reduction in reported cases of dracunculiasis (guinea-worm disease) with only 521 cases between January and September 2012 compared with 1006 confirmed cases for the same period in 2011 and of human African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness) to less than 7000 in 2011 from a high of 30 000 annual cases at the turn of the century.
- Rabies has been eliminated in several countries, with WHO eyeing regional elimination of this preventable disease by 2020. A new strategy which involves the early detection and use of antibiotics to treat Buruli ulcer has drastically reduced suffering and disability from this chronic and debilitating skin condition.
- An evaluation of WHO's new strategy, which aims at eradicating yaws by 2020 using a new oral antibiotic treatment designed to replace those developed in the 1950s (which mainly centered on delivering injections of benzathine benzylpenicillin).
- Threats posed by dengue: in 2012, dengue ranked as the fastest spreading vector-borne viral disease, with an epidemic potential in the world, registering a 30-fold increase in disease incidence over the past 50 years. The world needs to change its reactive approach and implement sustainable preventive measures.

While it defines the concept of elimination and eradication, the report also analyzes some challenges that remain at country level. It emphasizes the need for national disease control programmes to improve coordination and integration. It highlights the need to strengthen human resources and to work with other sectors such as education, agriculture and veterinary public health in disease control programmes.