

Novartis Foundation Launches New Leprosy Strategy at Symposium on Disease Elimination

- **The Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development (NFSD) launches a new strategy to help eliminate leprosy.**
- **For over 15 years, the annual symposium of the Novartis Foundation has provided an important platform for stakeholder dialogue on development and health policy issues.**

BASEL, Switzerland, Nov. 29 /CSRwire/ - Today's symposium of the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development (NFSD) convenes experts to discuss "What does it take to eliminate a disease?" Drawing lessons from previous successful disease control programs, the symposium speakers discuss innovative approaches and advocate for new coordination strategies in disease elimination efforts.

The Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development today also announces the launch of a new leprosy strategy based on the consensus reached by a group of leading experts earlier this year. The new strategy focuses on interrupting leprosy transmission through early diagnosis and treatment, contact tracing of former patients, diagnostic tools and strict surveillance and response.

"As part of our pledge to fight neglected diseases in the developing world, Novartis and the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development are committed to going the last mile to help make leprosy history," says Joseph Jimenez, CEO of Novartis, in an address to the symposium today. "This devastating disease is curable and I am proud that our donation of multidrug therapy (MDT) has helped treat over 5 million patients since 2000."

Thanks to the availability of MDT, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 15 million patients have been cured of leprosy since 1981, shrinking the worldwide prevalence by approximately 95%. Over the past eight years, however, the number of newly diagnosed leprosy patients has plateaued at around 230,000 cases per year. As experience with other disease control programs has shown, going the last mile is often the hardest. Waning knowledge means that as prevalence decreases, so do political will and funding.

"The key to eradicating smallpox was a comprehensive approach including the availability of an effective, heat stable vaccine, epidemiological surveillance, thorough research, involvement of local communities as well as strong management and commitment by the respective governments," says Professor Donald Henderson, former Head of the WHO's Smallpox Eradication Campaign. "Current elimination programs can also draw on these lessons learned."

Moving forward, the Novartis Foundation plans to take steps to demonstrate the feasibility and efficacy of this strategy in several sites in Asia, Africa and Latin America. "Zero transmission of leprosy is achievable, but we need to be better equipped and use innovative approaches if we are to find and treat the last patients," says Ann Aerts, Head of the Novartis Foundation. "In collaboration with our partners, we want to play a key role in curbing the incidence of leprosy."

More information about the program of today's symposium: www.novartisfoundation.org/symposium. You can follow the symposium live today as a webcast from 9:00am CET: www.novartisfoundation.org/webcast.

From 11:30am CET you can download the biographies and photos of speakers, as well as their speeches: www.novartisfoundation.org/symposium.

About the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development

The Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development is a nonprofit organization whose activities form part of the Corporate Responsibility portfolio of Novartis AG. For over 30 years, the Novartis Foundation has served as a competence center for corporate responsibility and international health, focused on underserved communities. NFSD aims to improve access to healthcare, strengthen human resources in health and empower vulnerable groups. The foundation also fosters dialogue and networking, acting as a bridge between the private sector, international organizations, governments and NGOs.

For more information, please visit:

www.novartisfoundation.org

www.youtube.com/novartisfoundation

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