

'The European Community policy aims to respond to what is now generally acknowledged as a global emergency: the death of five million people per year from three major communicable diseases: HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis...posing a serious threat to global health.' - Programme for Action: Accelerated Action on HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis in the context of Poverty Reduction, 2001

'The EU should aim for a contribution that helps to fill the financing gap for the three diseases to meet the MDG 6, and that reflects Europe's weight and importance as an international partner in development'
- European Programme for Action to Confront HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis through External Action (2007-2011)

January 12th, 2007

Dear Commissioner Dr. Potočník,

As you prepare to participate in the conference "The 7th EU Research Framework Programme – Europe on its Way to the Top" in Bonn on January 15-16, 2007, we write to express our dismay that funding for AIDS, malaria and TB have not been substantially increased under FP7 and remind you of the millions of the world's citizens being left behind, even dying, as a result of this policy.

The European Commission's 7th EU Research Framework Programme (FP7) demonstrates a critical opportunity for the EU to live up to political commitments made and to position itself as a leading contributor to the research and development needs of the global health emergencies facing the world's poor:

- The HIV/AIDS epidemic is spreading, with girls in sub-Saharan Africa among those at most risk
- Malaria kills between 1-3 million people annually, with children under five being the most vulnerable
- TB kills almost 2 million people a year, and extensively resistant forms (XDR-TB) now threaten action against both TB and HIV

These top three epidemics are highly interdependent, exacerbating the huge scale of the problem in the developing world. It is vital that all three are addressed simultaneously.

Under FP6, the European Commission spent considerably less than the 400 million Euros it promised on research to confront HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB. In comparison, last year alone the US spent \$3.43 billion, despite the EU pledge to become the world's leading research area by 2010.

Significant endeavours to close the 10/90 gap (only 10% of all spending on health research and development is devoted to the problems that primarily affect the poorest 90% of the world's population) should be the highest priority on the research agenda of the European Union. Over the past 18 months, the Commission has consistently promised that funding for research into HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB would increase under FP7. However, applicants face considerable hurdles to access this limited support, including raising matching funding. In the case of the EDCTP, a small portion of the funding that was supposed to have been spent by 2008 has only recently been awarded. We urge the Commission to make all of the 200 million Euros allocated to the EDCTP available to African and European scientific collaborations in 2007 to meet the original target date.

We welcome the inclusion of research into neglected diseases such as sleeping sickness and leishmaniasis for the first time under the FP7, and also efforts on emerging pandemics such as SARS and avian flu that could pose an additional threat to people in the developing world. Nonetheless, we are concerned about the resulting impact if these new priorities are not matched with adequate increase of financing. Maintaining funding at FP6 level or even lower will mean a massive loss in momentum in the fight against AIDS, malaria, TB and other neglected diseases. Progress in developing urgently needed diagnostic, treatment and prevention tools will be set back, including in particular:

- new user-initiated HIV prevention options such as vaginal and rectal microbicides;
- anti-malarial drug discovery to keep up in the race against resistance, and research into the implementation of existing tools;
- accelerating existing innovative European efforts on new TB drugs, diagnostics and vaccines.

We, therefore, urge you in the strongest possible terms to secure a level of funding sufficient to advancing and accelerating progress in all these areas. Such a response would be consistent with current EU development policy, as articulated in the Development Consensus, the Programme for Action on HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB, the Africa Strategy and with the obligations of the EU to protect the universal right to health, as enshrined in the UN Charter and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The EU cannot hope to provide the 'broad comprehensive approach' that it has committed to and meet its targets to reach the health related MDGs – to date the least likely to be achieved by 2015 - if resources for research into the top three killers are not increased and accessible to scientists in a more sustainable manner.

We ask the European Commission to ensure expansion of its financing of this critical research area considerably before the mid-term review planned for 2010. R&D for HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB has been under-funded and progress delayed for far too long. The price for this delay is paid in human lives. The time to invest in European research into diseases that affect the world's poor is now. As the announced title of the conference in Bonn suggests, tomorrow's answers start today.

Sincerely,

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Lori Heise,
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Marta Monteso Cullell, ActionAid International

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