Despite periodic events that disturb the socio-economic fabric of our country and even our health system there are encouraging results in oncho control. We commend APOC and the Mectizan Donation Programme for their support. We are convinced that today, elimination of onchocerciasis is possible in my country.

We know that if treatment with ivermectin is a wide range preventive measure that guarantees that future generations will not run the risk of becoming blind due to onchocerciasis, there are unfortunately thousands of our countrymen and women who are already blind though not because of onchocerciasis. It is our duty to be concerned about the future of these people.

We also know that several donors, international and non-governmental humanitarian organizations are interested in this problem. We would like to request that you approach these institutions on our behalf so that they will include Chad in their action plans. We are determined to meet this big challenge for the socio-economic development of our country depends on it.

Considering the results that ex-OCP and APOC countries have been getting since the beginning of the implementation of both OCP and APOC programmes, I think that Gulbenkian Foundation must be proud to have been supporting oncho control activities until 2007.

A re-orientation of Gulbenkian Foundation health strategy as regards development aid and cooperation with Portuguese-speaking African countries and East Timor focused on the promotion of ‘Maternal and Child Health’, ‘Infectious Diseases’ and ‘Human Resources Development’ as the main areas for project support, and this led to an interruption of financing for APOC activities.

Given the current global focus on the control of neglected tropical diseases (NTD) and how this can contribute to better health indicators in developing countries, the Gulbenkian Foundation is already providing support to the development of human resources for health in NTDs at post-doctoral level. We have also established, and created a Health Research Center for NTDs in the Province of Bengo, Caxito Municipality, in Angola. At community level, Gulbenkian Foundation may in the near future consider restarting its support for APOC-CDTI activities.

Question: What difference do you think your contribution has made to the control programme?

Answer: Let me start by saying that in a programme co-financed by several partners it is difficult to attribute the results to only one partner. It is nevertheless important to underscore that the African Development Bank Group has been funding onchocerciasis control since 1975. The bank’s contribution to OCP was 7.5 million Units of Account. Later the bank’s contributions to APOC phase I (1996-2001) rose to 2.0 million Units of account.

Approved in July 2008, 15 million Units of Account equivalent to 23 million USD for the period 2008-2015 we are engaged. This substantial increase by the ADF was deemed necessary to strengthen phasing-out activities. This contribution from ADF is considered to have made a great difference since it filled the financing gap required for the phasing-out stage.

The contribution also helped in the implementation of activities such as: i) enhanced CDTI activities; ii) co-implementation of multiple health interventions; iii) reinforcement of implementation of CDTI activities in post conflict countries; iv) capacity building; v) monitoring & evaluation, surveillance and research. In addition ADF contributions have contributed to gender mainstreaming in the APOC.

Research activities have led to a paradigm shift of the programme moving from control to elimination. Finally ADF contributions have contributed to poverty reduction in the affected countries, in line with the ADF mandate.
Since 1996 Cameroon has been participating in all the sessions of the Joint Action Forum of the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control. Cameroon believes in the APOC programme. I hereby reaffirm that Cameroon is fully committed, determined and willing to work towards elimination of the infection and interruption of the transmission of onchocerciasis in the whole country.

Question: What is the relationship between OPEC FUND and APOC? How do you evaluate APOC?

Answer: The OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) is an inter-governmental organization of countries which, themselves, are largely also developing. We are, thus, fully familiar with the pains and needs of the developing world. Indeed, a primary focus of OFID is the African Region. Most of the countries we work with are African countries. And in the years ahead, our Management under the leadership of Suleiman J. Al-Herbish (Saudi) expects to do even more for the continent.

OFID is pleased at the successes and continuing accomplishments of APOC. We are proud of our association with this well-managed programme. We are also proud of the great role our major Member Countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait in particular) are playing in APOC. This JAF16 was impressive. It was business-like, efficient and results-oriented. I certainly was honored and humbled to be part of it.

Question: Could you describe your partnership with APOC in river blindness control efforts in Africa?

Answer: Saudi Arabia was one of the early supporters of the program. Based on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Policy to provide development assistance to those who need it, the Saudi Fund for development, the main channel of the Saudi government assistance, has allocated more than U.S. 45 million for programme.

In addition, the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) is providing soft loans to develop the areas that are being freed from the disease to finance infrastructure projects like roads, health centers, education, electricity and agriculture projects.

The Saudi assistance to the program has helped African countries to improve their capacity building in the health sector and give hope to millions of people across the African continent.

The Saudi Assistance will continue until the River Blindness is history, and we are proud that we are part of the unique partnership that characterizes this program.

COMMENT FROM MERCK’S PRESIDENT & CHAIRMAN MR. RICHARD CLARK

“The African Program for Onchocerciasis control has helped tens of millions of people fight river blindness by enabling delivery of Mectizan. The program focus on building capacity and creating a sustainable healthy future. We congratulate APOC on this 15th anniversary, and look forward to continuing our collaboration in the years ahead.”

USAID has been a long time supporter (and donor) of Onchocerciasis Control in Africa.

The support for the Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) has over the last years received more interest from the American Congress with an increase in the budget for the support to National Programs for Integrated NTD Control Programs.

By integrating the control activities for several NTDs which affect the poorest of the poor, savings can be made, which means more efficient programs and being able to treat more people.

USAID believes that if APOC continues to integrate multiple NTDs in its CDI approach big health gains can be made.

Vision 2020 is an important global health initiative to eliminate avoidable blindness by the year 2020.

The initiative was launched in 1999 by the WHO and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, an umbrella body representing 111 NGOs and professional bodies involved in promoting eye health.

Of the eight major eye conditions that Vision 2020 targets, two – onchocerciasis and trachoma – are also part of the focus upon NTDs.

WHO estimated there are some 286 million people worldwide who are blind or have a severe visual impairment. 80% of this is avoidable, either through prevention or treatment. Without Vision 2020 programmes this figure would be much larger. Over the past 10 years there has been a significant decline in the prevalence of people blinded by cataract, trachoma and onchocerciasis. Undoubtedly, the work of APOC and the NGO, government and donor partners has made a major contribution to reducing global blindness. But, it has also demonstrated how community directed programmes can be a decisive tool in the promotion of public health. Certainly the Vision 2020 programme has much to learn from the success of onchocerciasis control programmes.