

**Dr Frank Olivier Richards, Director, River Blindness Program, The Carter Center, Atlanta, USA**

We should bare in mind that the main objective of JAF and APOC is to eliminate suffering which origins are found in sickness and poverty. ♦

**Prof Mamoun Homeida, Khartoum, Sudan, Président du TCC**

JAF 18 comes at an important time in the history of eli-

minating onchocerciasis. It is now clear that all partners, countries, donors and NGOs are all a time to head towards eliminating onchocerciasis from Africa. The signs showed at JAF 18 is that we can do it together. The donors have expressed willingness to support the APOC Program and extend its life to 2025 and not to end at 2015 as previously planned.



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**JAF 2012 : End of Forum in a rhyme of hope in the elimination of onchocerciasis and Neglected Tropical Diseases in Africa by 2025**



The Joint Action Forum (JAF) of the African Program for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC) meeting held from the 11th to 13th December 2012 in Bujumbura, Burundi, ended with a positive note.

In her speech, she had a thought for the most remote population, those at the end of the road. she wishes that partners and countries increase their financial contributions to permit APOC to fulfill its mission.

Closing the session, Dr Sabine Ntakarutimana, Minister of Public Health and fight against Aids and newly President of 18JAF repeated the will expressed by participants, the hope to free Africa from Onchocerciasis and other Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) by 2025.

Finally, she expressed abundantly her gratitude to the organizers before wishing to all the participants, her best wishes for end of year feast and next year.

**Souvenir**

The lanterns went off on the reflexion forum held in Bujumbura in connection with the fight against onchocerciasis and neglected tropical diseases in Africa. Nevertheless, pressure will be mounted on participants' concern with various recommendations. Though, the conclusion and decision are yet to be made available, everybody will keep in mind the headlines of resolution taken just after the closure session.

It is worth to recall that two joyful events were recorded. First, the symbolic gift from APOC to the newly elected President. Secondly, the technical consultative

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committee handed a gift to the outgoing Director of APOC which is going on retirement. According to TCC president, Dr Paul-Samson Lusamba-Dikassa is rewarded for the quality of the work he has done as Director of APOC during his 20 months term of office.



The Director of APOC to the newly elected president of Joint Action Plan « good luck ».



The President talking on behalf of TCC « We will miss your wisdom and friendship ».

### What they said

**Dr Caroline Harper, Chief Executive, Sightsavers, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, United Kingdom, Vice-Chair JAF18**

This is a good example on international cooperation with partners able to defend a common cause which is the fight against onchocerciasis. It will be interesting to appreciate the implementation of NTD this year. ♦

**Xavier Daney : 18 JAF Legal Adviser**

**What role do you play at special adviser ?**

It is to assist the forum to take decisions according to law and regulation. In this case, the Forum uses WHO rules and everyone has to abide by them. Traditionally, a legal

adviser takes part in all WHO meeting as a participant.



They are most of the time medical doctors and in case of health decision, they might not be aware on some legal aspects governing some decisions. We are there to assist them in the decisions, recommendation they take. ♦

**Dr Sabine Ntakarutimana, Minister of Public Health and fight against AIDS, new president of JAF**

**Do you usually defend women`s rights in your day to day duties ?**

Yes, of course.

**Two women at the head of JAF: it raises questions ?**

Concerning JAF, it is just coincidental. It is right that Burundi was already Vice-President. As God had kept me in life, I have been chosen at the same moment with the Vice-President who is a woman. I am personally happy with the decision.

**What do you expect to do during your term of office ?**

It is to continue, whenever it is possible, to highlight women`s roles. In the fight against onchocerciasis for instance, if we don`t take into consideration gender issues, it will be difficult to have good results. ♦

**Dr Maïmouna Diop Ly, Senior Health Analyst, ADB, Ghana**

Globally, I think that all the main objectives set for 18 JAF were achieved, notably the adoption of a conceptual note, its running budget, taking into consideration the require amendment.

According to ADB, we think that the progress of APOC should continue towards elimination. The implication of the bank will enable a better efficiency in terms of running the Program and better use of resources. It is also neces-

sary to note the advocacy towards highest ranking people starts now in order to look for funding for Elimination objectives.

Moreover, governance being a key point in the bank`s strategy to follow-up programs, we are satisfied with the management of the program and also with the results so far. We do appreciate the multiple partnerships and new donors, States, NGOs and philanthropists. We call for a continue commitment in the fight against NTD. ♦

**Nadjilar Lokemla, National Coordinator-Program for fight against onchocerciasis-Tchad**

To me, 18 JAF is a great success for many reasons: (a) all the partners recognized the various form of assistance APOC brings to endemic countries and which has produced excellent results; b) the enthusiasm of donors and their commitment to support APOC not only for onchocerciasis, but also for NTD. In a nutshell, I am quite happy for the 18 JAF decision to free Africa from NTD and onchocerciasis. ♦

**Mr Laston Douglas Sitima, National Onchocerciasis Coordinator, Ministry of Health & Population, Lilongwe 3 Capitol City, Malawi**

18 JAF was a success. We were well received by the Burundian Government. Concerning epidemiological result, it was seen that progress has been made for the elimination of onchocerciasis. A call for more efforts was understood by governments, donors and NGOs. They reaffirmed their commitment to assist in the fight with the goal to reach at the level of elimination. ♦

**Dr Amenan Marie Madeleine Kouakou, Director/Coordinator of the National Program for fight against blindness, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire**

We took part in a great meeting well organized by the Government of Burundi. We do express our gratitude to that effect. At the end of the 18th session of JAF, we have hope that elimination of onchocerciasis will be a reality in Africa. We saw the commitment of countries, donors and NGDOS. ♦

**Dr Benoît Kémata-Coordinator of the National Program for fight against blindness, Bangui, CAR**

I am fully satisfied for the organization. I appreciated the discussions and the important decisions taken, namely

the endorsement and the approval of strategic action plan and the budget for the transitional period 2013 – 2015 and for the period of 2016 – 2025. This will help countries to move towards the elimination of onchocerciasis in Africa. ♦

**Dr Arzouma Ouédraogo, Chief of service of planification, follow-up and evaluation the the Ministry of Health Burkina Faso**

I keep good impressions of this 18 JAF. It has enable us to notice the progress made on the fight against onchocerciasis in Africa in terms of treatment in varous countries. This session reveals the necessity to more integrate the fight against onchocerciasis and the NTD. The changing of paradygm from control to elimination will give more momentum for the success of the fight in Burkina Faso. ♦

**Simon Bush, Director NTDs, SightSavers Accra, Ghana**

Onchocerciasis has become in just few years, a program of itself for SightsSavers. It is John Wilson, the widow of Jane Wilson, the founder of SightSavers who coined the word “River Blindness” during a trip to Ghana in 1950. We think that the new program of elimination is quite important and SightSavers has decided to support APOC with funds. We appreciated that funds were allocated for NTD and also, the future role of APOC in this domain. SightSavers considers itself as an important link between onchocerciasis and lymphatic filariasis. ♦

**Dr Nana Kwadwo Biritwum, Program Manager, NTD Programme, Ghana Health Service, Accra**

JAF meetings have always been well organised and JAF 18 has been no exception. Attendance has been good though, it was disappointing that many of Health ministers were unable to attend. That is why no new commitment was made by donors for the fight against onchocerciasis. ♦

**Dr. Pierre-Claver Bigirimana, Senior Health Specialist, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Québec, Canada**

I noticed : a good organization, excellent presentations, very encouraging and strong mobilization for the elimination of onchocerciasis, good perspectives for the fight against NTD. ♦