The 17th session of the Joint Action Forum (JAF) of the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC) opens today at the conference hall of Sheraton Kuwait Hotel & Towers. This year’s session, meeting from 12 to 14 December 2011, is most graciously hosted by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development.

The JAF meets once a year to decide on the strategies, objectives and policies of the Programme, discuss and approve APOC’s plan of action and budget, and review the progress report of APOC. The eleven ex-OCP countries are invited to the December session.

During the three day meeting many critical issues will be discussed by participants and some important decisions that will determine the future of onchocerciasis control in Africa are expected to be made by the JAF.

I am most honored to welcome members of the JAF and other participants to the seventeenth session of the Joint Action Forum taking place in the beautiful capital city of Kuwait.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude and heartfelt thanks to the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development for the generous hospitality they have graciously extended to every participant attending this meeting, and the excellent facilities to ensure a successful meeting.

To the donors, NGDOs and other partners, I say a sincere ‘thank you’ for your continuous commitment and support to onchocerciasis control in Africa, and to alleviating the suffering of onchocerciasis endemic communities. There are critical issues to be discussed during this meeting and you will be called upon to take some major decisions that will affect the future of the programme and the direction it must take in the next few years. I know that, as always, you will come up with the right decisions that will continue to improve the lives of the poor rural population most affected by river blindness. I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Dr Luis G. Sambo
WHO Regional Director

Programme for Opening Ceremony - Monday 12 December 2011, 09:00 - 10:30

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<th>Time</th>
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<td>09:00 - 09:10</td>
<td>Opening Statement by H.E. Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development</td>
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<td>09:10 – 09:20</td>
<td>Address by the Chair of JAF16, H.E. Prof. Chukwu Onyebuchi, Minister of Health, Nigeria</td>
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<td>09:20 – 09:30</td>
<td>Address by the APOC Director, Dr. Paul Samson Lusamba Dikassa</td>
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<td>09:30 – 09:40</td>
<td>Introductory Video Film on the Unique Partnership of APOC</td>
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<td>09:40 – 10:10</td>
<td>Adjournment for Opening of the Exhibition, Coffee Break and Departure of H.E. The Minister of Foreign Affairs</td>
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<td>10:10 – 10:15</td>
<td>Address by Mr. Henrik Secher, Managing Director for Africa, Merck &amp; Co. Inc.</td>
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<td>10:15 – 10:20</td>
<td>Address by a Senior Member of the Gates Foundation, Dr. Julie Jacobson</td>
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<td>10:20 – 10:30</td>
<td>Keynote Address by the WHO Regional Director</td>
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It is with the greatest pleasure that I welcome JAF members and other participants to the 17th session of the Joint Action Forum (JAF). I feel very privileged and honored to attend my first JAF meeting as Director of APOC.

Our profound gratitude and thanks go to the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development for hosting this session and for the very excellent facilities placed at the disposal of every participant at this meeting.

We also thank most sincerely all the donors, NGOs, countries and partners who have travelled to Kuwait for this meeting and for their continuous support to the APOC Programme.

There are many important items on the agenda of this session - critical issues will be discussed and important decisions taken. I wish you successful deliberations.

The daily journal available in Arabic, English and French will give you an overview of the proceedings of various sessions of the meeting, statements from different participants, as well as provide useful information about the meeting and your stay in Kuwait City.

The APOC secretariat is at your disposal for any further information or assistance you may require.

I wish you all a pleasant stay in Kuwait City.

**HIGHLIGHTS SINCE JAF16**

**Change at the Helm of APOC:** Dr Paul-Samson Lusamba-Dikassa took over as the new director of APOC in April 2011 following the retirement of Dr Uche Veronica Amazigo in March 2011. Before joining APOC, Dr Lusamba-Dikassa was Director of Programme Management at the WHO Regional Office for Africa. Dr Lusamba-Dikassa holds the degrees of Doctor of Medicine, Master of Public Health, and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Epidemiology.

**First African Donation to the APOC Trust Fund:** At the last JAF, General T. Y. Danjuma, founder of the NGO MITOSATH announced that he would donate the sum of one million US dollars to the APOC Trust Fund to show his support for the unique partnership that has done so much for onchocerciasis control. General Danjuma commended APOC for alleviating the sufferings of rural populations in Africa. The funds were booked into the APOC Trust Fund at the World Bank in October 2011.

**Finalization of the RAPLOA Map:** The occurrence of severe adverse events (SAEs) in areas with co-endemcity of Loa loa and onchocerciasis has been one of the serious challenges APOC has had to face. Based on results of RAPLOA surveys carried out in 4798 villages in 11 Sub-Saharan African countries, and using GIS tools and geo-statistical methods, a contour map of the estimated prevalence of loiasis in Africa was developed, and has been shared with other partners in NTDs control/elimination programmes. This map is particularly useful for oncho control and LF elimination programmes, and can be used to predict where ivermectin treatment for onchocerciasis can be safely implemented, among other things.
11:05 - 18:15  Discussions

(v) Statements by the Honorable Ministers of Health – Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda

(vi) Statements by Honorable Ministers of Health of ex-OCP countries – Benin Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo

Tea break

Discussion

Conclusions and decisions on the agenda items 5 and 6

7. Report of the Technical Consultative Committee (TCC)

Discussions

Conclusions and decisions

8. Status of Onchocerciasis Control in former OCP countries

Conclusions and decisions

17:55 - 18:10  8. Status of Onchocerciasis Control in former OCP countries

17:25 - 17:40

17:40 - 17:50

17:50 - 17:55

17:55 - 18:10

18:10 - 18:15

PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME OF WORK - DAY II
TUESDAY 13 DECEMBER 2011

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE

08:30-08:40  19. Amendments to part II of the Memorandum for APOC

Conclusion and practical arrangements for signature

CDTI: IMPLEMENTATION/MONITORING/EVALUATION/SURVEILLANCE (CONT’D)

08:40-09:00  9. Elimination of Onchocerciasis transmission in Africa: recent evaluation studies and update on disease distribution map

STRENGTHENING HEALTH SYSTEMS AND CO-IMPLEMENTATION

09:00-09:20  10. Co-implementation:

- Integrated mapping of five NTDs and mapping of loiasis (eye worm)

- Co-implementation

09:30-09:45  11. Capacity building of countries

09:45-10:05  Discussions on agenda items 9, 10 & 11

10:05-10:10  Conclusions and decisions on agenda items 9,10 and 11

10:10-10:40  Tea Break

THE FUTURE OF APOC

10:40-10:50  Introductory film by the World Bank & APOC


10:50-10:55  (i) External views on Co-implementation

10:55-11:00  (ii) External views on Elimination

11:00-11:05  (iii) External views on the Future of APOC

11:05-11:20  (iv) Final conclusions and recommendations of the CSA to JAF

CLOSED SESSIONS

11:20-12:30  13. Closed session of the:

(i) Ministers of Health of African countries

(ii) Donors

(iii) NGOs

12:30-14:00  Lunch Break

13. Closed session (Cont’d) of the:

(i) Ministers of Health of African countries

(ii) Donors

(iii) NGOs

16:00-16:30  Tea Break

Outcome of the sessions of the

16:30-16:45  (i) Ministers of Health of African countries

16:45-17:00  (ii) Donors

17:00-17:15  (ii) NGOs

Discussions on the outcomes of the closed door session and adoption of the conclusions and decisions on agenda items 12 & 13:

RESEARCH AND DRUG DEVELOPMENT

17:35-17:50  Address by Prof David Molyneux (The role of medical research in the tropical diseases control, Oncho success


APOC: Unique global public - private partnership

JAF 17 GUIDE & IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Medical Services: An ambulance is available 24 hours

In Case of emergencies: Call 8 on the hotel telephone before 5pm; After 5pm call duty manager on 99768972 or contact the concierge in the hotel lobby.

Help desk: is located in the hotel lobby

Ticketing & travel information: Contact Business Centre in the lobby

JAF17 Exhibition: Coral Ballroom lobby level

Banking: ATM machine in the lobby in the arcade

National Bank of Kuwait located across the street from the hotel!

Badges: Will be delivered to rooms

Meeting rooms: Opening ceremony: Crystal Ball Room - Plenary sessions: Diamond Ball Room

Closed sessions Ministers, Donors, NGOs: Emerald A Room, Emerald B Room, Emerald C Room

Special Events: Dinner offered by Kuwait Fund on Tuesday, 13 December 2011 at Radisson Blue, Al Hashemi Hall.

Departure from hotel lobby at 7:30pm

Working hours: 8:30 –12:30 & 14:00—18:00 with coffee breaks at 10:00 & 16:00

Interpretation: Simultaneous interpretation is available in Arabic, English, French and Portuguese.
The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) representing the State of Kuwait has been contributing to the financing of onchocerciasis control in Africa since the launching of the first large-scale programme, the Onchocerciasis Control Programme (OCP) in 1974 in West Africa.

Founded in 1961 just after independence the KFAED set a precedent as the first national institution established by a developing nation to provide support to others in the developing world. Initially established to provide assistance to Arab countries the Fund soon extended its activities to the rest of the developing world in 1974.

Onchocerciasis was considered a major cause for the depopulation and emigration from oncho zones during the 1960’s and 1970’s that led to fertile valleys being abandoned. Thanks to the operations and activities of the OCP (1974 – 2002) most of these zones have become oncho-free, and in the mid-1980s immigration and repopulation started especially as other areas were experiencing droughts. Many areas experienced very high population growth rates and the need to ensure food security for these new settlements became paramount.

In addition to contributing to the APOC Trust Fund, Kuwait Fund, in line with its priority in Africa to assist countries in their efforts to attain the UN Millennium Development Goals, particularly to eradicate poverty, also financed/co-financed several irrigation projects in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal with the aim of increasing agricultural production to reinforce food security and improve the living conditions of millions of poor and vulnerable populations in rural communities.

These projects: dam construction, irrigation and drainage schemes, schools, health centres, water supply, rural roads, electricity transition, resettlement of rural population, capacity building, training and research, totaled more than 213 million US$. The projects covered a potential area of almost 700,000 hectares and have benefited over seven million people in rural villages and communities.

There has been significant increase in agricultural density, crop area distribution and hectare production as well as fishery and livestock production; jobs have been created, income sources have increased and diversified. The difference in the lives of these rural populations has been remarkable - the poverty and famine they once knew are things of the past, and they can now look forward to a brighter future.

Thanks to all the different partners that make up the APOC unique global public-private partnership, life has returned to normal for millions of people in onchocerciasis endemic villages and they can now look forward to a brighter future.