OPENING SESSION
The 17th session of the Joint Action Forum of the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control started deliberations on 12 December 2011 at the Sheraton Kuwait Hotel and Towers. The official opening ceremony was chaired by H. E. Sheikh Sabah Khaled Alhama Al Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait. The representative of the Regional Director of WHO/AFRO, the Director of APOC, Ministers and Heads of delegation of APOC and ex-OCP countries, donors, NGDOs and other partners were in attendance. The meeting will finish on 14 December 2011.

EXCERPT OF THE SPEECH OF DR MATSHIDISO MOETI, REPRESENTING THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF WHO AFRICA
It is a distinct honor and privilege for me to deliver this statement on behalf of Dr Luis Gomes Sambo, Regional Director of WHO/AFRO. Your presence at this forum is a true testimony of your unwavering commitment to onchocerciasis control in Africa.

APOC is the envy of many, for it has the good fortune to have partners who are committed to achieving what they set out to do several years ago. No one here can be in any doubt about the success of the APOC partnership. The results and achievements of both the OCP and APOC programmes are clear for all to see.

Distinguished members of the JAF, this praise belongs to you, for the strength of APOC lies in its special partnership. We have indeed come a long way from the world that Robert McNamara saw not so very long ago - a world where 50% of able-bodied adults were blind; where poverty was rife because people had to abandon fertile riverine lands to move to “oncho” safe but arid lands, where for every blind individual, two lives were jeopardized, that of the blind adult and that of the child who had to lead him or her around and could not go to school or learn a trade. Thanks to this great partnership that world is no more, and I’m sure you will all agree with me that such a world must never be allowed to come back.

This partnership has not just delivered ivermectin to oncho-endemic populations, but the difference made to the lives of affected communities, both socially and economically, is priceless. Though the successes have been many, there is still more to be done. There is need for the onchocerciasis elimination agenda to be pursued. Activities will need to be intensified in post conflict countries to ensure they achieve satisfactory geographic and therapeutic coverage rates.

Distinguished members of JAF, I have no doubt that your usual wisdom will prevail, and that your unwavering commitment to alleviating the suffering of the poor will enable you come up with the right decisions for the programme.
EXCERPT OF THE SPEECH OF PROF. CO. NYEBUCHI CHUKWU MOH OF NIGERIA, CHAIRMAN OF JAF 16

In the past I had the opportunity to attend some JAF sessions. However this is my first time as APOC Director and it is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to be addressing you in this capacity. In the last seven months I have, on several occasions witnessed firsthand the effectiveness of this vibrant partnership that has been fighting onchocerciasis in Africa for more than three decades.

When stakeholders agreed to contribute to large-scale onchocerciasis control 37 years ago the most that could be expected was to control the disease as a public health problem. Today, their expectations have been surpassed, for the feasibility of elimination of the disease is now firmly established.

Your deliberations at this session are expected to lead to decisions of critical importance for the future of onchocerciasis control and elimination in Africa. Affected communities, front line workers, governments and partners eagerly await your decisions. I thank all delegations for honouring the invitation to attend JAF 17, and all the donors and partners who continue to provide the necessary resources to sustain and win the fight against river blindness in Africa. I thank the members of the JAF for their guidance and continuous support in the implementation of the APOC programme.

EXCERPT OF THE SPEECH OF DR. P.S. LUSAMBA-DIKASSA, APOC DIRECTOR

In conclusion, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, the year 2011 was full of challenges and I am happy to note however that all the partners of the programme addressed with much success. Your Excellencies, Honorable Ministers and distinguished delegates, I thank you for your attention, and wish us successful deliberations.

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

COTI: 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:
09:20-09:30 - 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) NGDOs

12:30-14:00 Lunch Break
13. Closed session (Cont’d) of the:
(i) Ministers of Health of African countries
(ii) Donors
(iii) NGDOs
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 (iii) NGDOs

17:15-17:35 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
It is an honor for me to speak on behalf of Merck at this forum that signifies so much for the health of many people in Africa. As a global health company, part of our work involves discovering and developing new medicines and vaccines. But we also have a commitment to increase access to the products we develop through partnerships. We are humbled to play our role in the APOC partnership – one of the most successful international public health partnerships. We remain committed to working with this alliance of partners to protect future generations of Africans from river blindness. In addition to reaffirming our commitment to build on nearly 25 years of successful partnership in combating river blindness, I would also like to highlight Merck’s commitment to work with health officials and other stakeholders in Africa to explore new partnerships to advance human health. We have an exciting portfolio of programs and initiatives in 2012 which will enable access to medicines and vaccines throughout Africa. These efforts range from a $500 million investment towards maternal mortality efforts, to new partnerships to fight breast and cervical cancers in sub-Saharan Africa and access initiatives on HIV/AIDS, family planning and other relevant therapeutic areas.
The CSA would like to pay tribute to Dr. Uche Veronica Amazigo for managing APOC with great passion and commitment during her tenure as Director from 2005 to 2011 and the CSA wish her a healthy and pleasant retirement and hope that she will find time to share her huge experience in oncho.

The CSA welcomes Dr. Paul Lusamba, the new Director of APOC and would like to assure the JAF of his deep knowledge and commitment to the programme. The CSA is confident that Dr Lusamba will be able to move APOC to even higher heights.

Like in previous years, APOC has again had another year of important growth and innovative developments. Almost 76 million people out of a total population of 99.9 million were treated with ivermectin. Compared to 2009, the number of people treated in 2010 has increased by 11%. Without a doubt the objective of treating 90 million people by 2015, given partners sustained support and commitment, is achievable.

Based on the positive picture of the programme in terms of possible elimination of onchocerciasis and strengthening health systems in countries, and taking into account the huge investment made by the international community over many years, supporting the efforts of the Programme for a few more years would ensure sustainability of the achievements and secure the investments made to date.

The CSA highlights the important role that NGDOs are playing within APOC by providing funding and giving technical support to onchocerciasis and other NTD related activities in countries. Guidance was also provided by the CSA to APOC management in the preparation of JAF17 to increase visibility and mobilize partners within the current context of global financial crisis.

The CSA would like to appreciate the contributions of all the partners. With the finishing line in sight, the CSA calls on all partners to reaffirm your commitment, and on governments to strengthen further their leadership and ownership of the fight.

The CSA would like again to commend the APOC Management for the excellent work they continue to perform urge everyone to jointly intensify efforts for a vision of Africa without ONCHO.

**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, NGDOs : 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.