

Agence France Presse -- English : G8 set deadline for health package to Africa

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BYLINE: Shaun Tandon

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The Group of Eight leaders on Tuesday set a five-year deadline to provide 60 billion dollars to fight disease in Africa, but activists said the pledge meant little to the continent's poor.

The leaders, holding a summit in Japan, pledged as part of their package to provide 100 million insecticide-treated nets to Africa by 2010, saying the plan had the potential to save thousands of deaths caused by malaria.

But rock singer-turned-activist Bob Geldof voiced disappointment with the summit outcome, saying that for the most part, the leaders of the world's richest nations had "simply reiterated a lot of things they said last year."

"I think the G8 have a different view of commitment to what I have," Geldof told AFP in an interview. "I'm disappointed although I must say we didn't expect much from this G8."

Geldof, founder of the Live Aid concert for Africa in 1985, said that aid pledges were meaningless unless individual governments put the money in their budgets.

"The bad boys here are France and Italy," said Geldof, faulting both countries for being far behind in meeting aid pledges.

He however praised Britain, Germany and the United States for taking the lead in stepping up aid to Africa.

Japan invited eight African leaders to a special session on Monday with the G8 -- which comprises Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States.

The leaders reconfirmed a promise made three years ago in Gleneagles, Scotland for the G8 to double aid to Africa by 25 billion dollars by 2010.

1. This Day- (Lagos, Nigeria) 1 July 2008- "African Health Strategy Requires Urgent Funding, AU Told"

This Day (Lagos)

NEWS

1 July 2008

Posted to the web 2 July 2008

By Abimbola Akosile

Lagos

A coalition of two hundred and five African and global organisations and networks have called on the Heads of State of the African Union (AU) to ensure the Implementation Plan of the AU Africa Health Strategy is urgently and adequately funded.

The African leaders and Ministers of Finance were also enjoined to restate and accelerate implementation of the AU Abuja Commitment to allocate 15 per cent of budgets to health.

The calls were premised on the fact that the Health Strategy Implementation Plan was to be presented for final approval to the Assembly of Heads of States meeting in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt on June 30 and July 1.

The Implementation Plan was adopted by African Ministers of Health on May 17 this year, following presentation of the Health Strategy last year by the AU Commission Social Affairs Division.

It provides guidelines for implementing various African health frameworks, health MDGs and global Universal Access targets including on TB, HIV and AIDS, Malaria, Child and Maternal Health.

In a statement on the eve of the Assembly, Coordinator of the Africa Public Health 15% Now Campaign, Mr. Rotimi Sankore said, "the AU Africa Health Strategy is a landmark document. But without funding for its Implementation Plan from our Heads of State and Finance Ministers, it will be reduced to an empty gesture".

"This is likely to result in even more deaths than the current 8 million African lives lost annually to mainly five health conditions being TB, HIV and AIDS, Malaria, child and maternal mortality."

According to Sankore, "while many of our Finance Ministers recognise the urgency of health funding, they have not acted on this and need to do so. It is also serious cause for concern that some think that there are other issues more important than health. We are not saying that roads, or energy are not important. But we are saying that dead or dying people have no need for them."

"Africa's human capital is its greatest development asset. But with Africa losing 4.8 million infants and children annually, and average healthy life expectancy dropping to less than 40 years in many countries, not only is our future dying before our eyes, millions of skilled workers and professionals that provide the engine for economic development, and underpin the purchasing power vital to growing economies are dying in their prime," he emphasised further.

The Campaign coordinator cautioned African governments against being carried away by hollow economic growth statistics.

"Statistical economic growth, with no sustainable investment in social development: health, food production, education, gender equality, water and sanitation, is negative growth; because there is no real improvement in living standards and social and economic rights", he said.

He underlined that African governments must start investing sustainably in health now before the cost of containing infectious diseases in particular spirals out of control.

"For instance, latest Stop TB partnership/World Bank analysis indicates that the cost of not treating TB to Africa between 2006 and 2015 would be \$519bn while TB can be controlled with \$20bn in the same period."

The 15% Now Campaign Coordinator called on African leaders to ensure that they go from the AU Summit to the Japan G8 in early July with a message that they are meeting their own commitments alongside calls for global commitments to be met.

"If we compare health expenditure and key indicators between more developed and developing countries of roughly equivalent population: Japan which hosts the G8 next month and Nigeria have 127m and 144m people respectively".

"Japan spends 17.8 per cent of its budget on health. Nigeria only 3.5 per cent. Japan has 270,371 doctors, 1.2m nurses and midwives, and 241,369 Pharmacists. Nigeria only 34,923 doctors and 210,306 nurses and midwives, and 6,344 pharmacists. Japans healthy life expectancy is 75 years and Nigeria's a mere 42 years. Japan has 17,000 people living with HIV, Nigeria has 2.9m. Japan has a TB prevalence of 37,490, Nigeria has 889,666", Sankore disclosed.

"Even taking into account the poaching of African health workers by developed countries to subsidise their own health systems, at current levels of investment in health systems and disease specific issues, it is clear to see that Japans health will get better while Nigeria's will get worse unless Nigeria increases its own health investment to ensure that international solidarity is meaningful", he added.

The Africa Public Health '15% Now' campaign launched on December 10 2006 (International Human Rights Day) is the first to articulate Public Health for Africa as a Rights and Development issue across Africa and beyond. It brings together actors from various key sectors of civil society.

The Campaign is based on the premise that 'we all have to be alive and well to exercise any other rights in any meaningful way' and therefore that Right to Health and to Healthcare is arguably the most crucial right of all as articulated by Article 16 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, the constitution of the World Health Organisation and Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

2. Associated Press- 23 June 2008- G-8 summit eyes targets to tackle global shortage of health-

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TOKYO, June 23 (Kyodo) - The Group of Eight nations are discussing setting numerical targets at the leaders' summit in July to tackle the world's chronic shortage of health workers, especially in Africa and Asia, by meeting the World Health Organization's minimum threshold, sources close to the negotiations said Sunday.

Japan, as host of the July 7-9 summit, is particularly pushing for G-8 cooperation to promote universal access to reproductive health services and increased birth attendance by skilled attendants in Africa to 75 percent in five years to drive forward the U.N. Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, the sources said.

The G-8 members are considering including in a set of guidelines the WHO goal of having at least 4.1 health service providers and support workers per 1,000 population, including 2.3 health workers -- doctors, nurses and midwives -- per 1,000 population, by 2015.

While stopping short of making new commitments, the countries are likely to mention the WHO figures as targets for strengthening their financial and other support to train and retain health workers, the sources said.

A draft of the envisioned document stresses the urgency for international cooperation, while calling for a better mechanism to deliver aid as this year marks the midpoint of the 2000-2015 MDGs, according to the sources.

It also stresses the importance of a multi-sectoral approach in dealing with the health issue which is interrelated with other development goals such as eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal access to primary education and securing environmental sustainability.

The "sherpa" personal representatives of G-8 leaders from Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States are also discussing setting up a "follow-up mechanism," such as having an annual report to ensure accountability.

An appendix to the draft guidelines lists existing G-8 commitments to support the global fight against infectious diseases and tackle other health-related issues, the sources said.

Japan played an important role in promoting efforts in tackling global health issues during its previous presidency in 2000, when it launched at the G-8 Kyushu Okinawa Summit the "Okinawa Infectious Diseases Initiative." It led eventually to creation of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in 2002.

The fund now plays a central role in combating the three diseases that kill five million people each year.

However, issues remain due to the lack of comprehensive plans to secure basic infrastructure such as clinics and hospitals, training of doctors, nurses and other health workers, and necessary funds to pay salaries to retain such skilled workforce.

Fifty-seven countries, mostly in Africa and Asia, face a severe health workforce crisis. Among them, sub-Saharan Africa faces the greatest challenges -- while it has 11 percent of the world's populations and 24 percent of the global burden of diseases, it has only 3 percent of the world's health workers.

The WHO estimates that filling the shortage in Africa alone would require training over 1.5 million more health workers, which will cost at least \$7 billion a year.

Last November, Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura announced Japan's plan to propose the G-8 summit issue guidelines to improve maternal and child health in developing countries, including strengthening the healthcare system and boosting research and development.

Japan's call for stronger engagement in global health issues was also emphasized when it hosted the Tokyo International Conference on African Development in late May.

In sub-Saharan Africa, where many countries are likely to miss the eight-point set of MDGs by 2015 under current conditions, child mortality under five remains 20 times that in the developed world. The risk of pregnancy- and childbirth-related deaths for women is 200 times higher than in developed nations.

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3. Associated Press-9 June 2008- G-8 leaders should invest more in public health, key agencies say

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GENEVA (AP) - The heads of key organizations involved in public health called on leading industrialized countries Monday to invest more in fighting disease.

The G-8 leaders should step up long-term efforts to combat AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, polio and other health threats to build on progress they have made from previous commitments, said the heads of U.N. agencies and other organizations.

In an open letter to the International Herald Tribune they said new commitments by the leaders at the G-8 summit in Toyako, Japan, in July would reduce child deaths, undernutrition and global diseases. They also could provide more clean water and sanitation to people around the world. The members of the Group of Eight are Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, and the United States. Previous commitments by the G-8 contributed to increasing HIV treatment in poor countries, reducing the number of malaria deaths in parts of Africa, halting tuberculosis epidemics in some countries and bringing polio close to eradication.

But critics say there has been little progress toward the goal of achieving universal access to comprehensive prevention programs, treatment and care for the diseases, or toward developing and strengthening African health systems.

«Better health in the developing world is a vital contribution to our collective security,» the agencies said.

«A world that neglects the health of people is neither stable nor secure,» said the letter.

It was signed by the heads of the World Health Organization, UNICEF, UNAIDS, the U.N. Population Fund, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, the GAVI Alliance, which works toward greater access to vaccines and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Also backing the letter was the World Bank.

4. Reuters- 5 June 2008- Bush pushes G8 countries on disease aid for Africa

Thursday, 5 June 2008, 17:59 GMT- Reuters

WASHINGTON, June 5 (Reuters) - U.S. President George W. Bush on Thursday pressed fellow rich nations to make good on their pledges to provide \$60 billion to help African countries combat diseases like malaria and HIV/AIDS.

The Group of Eight industrialized nations promised the money at their summit in Germany last year but set no timetable for disbursing the funds, raising some questions about the commitment to help the world's poorest continent.

"At the last G8, our partners stood up and made strong commitments to help Africa deal with malaria and HIV/AIDS," Bush said at the groundbreaking ceremony for the U.S. Institute of Peace. "They have yet to make good on their commitments."

"I will remind them it's one thing to make a promise, it's another thing to write the check," he said, referring to the upcoming G8 meeting in Japan in July. "The American government expects our partners to live up to their obligations."

A White House spokesperson said the United States was current with its share of the money pledged last year.

Bush's effort to draw attention and aid for combating diseases in Africa has been one of the widely hailed successes of his foreign policy agenda, which has been dominated by criticism of the U.S.-led war in Iraq.

Earlier this year Bush proposed doubling to \$30 billion over five years his signature foreign aid program, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. Launched in 2003, it provides for programs and drugs in 15 countries -- 12 in Africa plus Vietnam, Guyana and Haiti.

There are 33 million people worldwide infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, with two-thirds of them in sub-Saharan Africa, according to U.N. estimates.

In April lawmakers in the U.S. House of Representatives approved a measure expanding funding for the AIDS relief, tuberculosis and malaria programs to \$50 billion.

In June 2005 Bush launched a \$1.2 billion, 5-year plan to reduce deaths caused by malaria by 50 percent in 15 African countries.

During Bush's trip to Africa in February, he unveiled a plan, in conjunction with the World Bank, to distribute 5.2 million insecticide-treated bed nets to protect infants in Tanzania. Mosquito bites are a primary way malaria is spread. (Reporting by Jeremy Pelofsky, editing by David Alexander and David Wiessler)

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