INAUGURATION OF THE NATIONAL REFERENCE LABORATORY IN LESOTHO

Speech by
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“First Lady of Lesotho, your Honorable Minister of Health and Social Welfare, members of the diplomatic corps, international organizations and agencies, distinguished guests, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen -

Being here today, 12 months after receiving an invitation from the WHO’s Stop TB Department and the Government of Lesotho to collaborate in a laboratory strengthening project in response to the MDR-XDR-HIV TB crisis, and to witness first hand the great
achievements accomplished in such a short period of time makes FIND very proud, and grateful, for the opportunity we received to make possible such a worthwhile undertaking.

The local support, and seamless partnership and synergy between the Ministry of Health and Partners In Health, who together transformed Botšabelo hospital into an MDR facility in addition to contributing enormously to our renovation endeavors for the National Referral Laboratory, have ensured that Maseru can today proudly announce a fully integrated solution for tackling the MDR-XDR emergency.

FIND is a non-profit organization dedicated to the development of new technologies for the diagnosis of poverty-related infectious diseases. Our vision is not only to develop new tests but to accompany them into National Disease Control Programs.

We are here today to introduce liquid culture media in a completely refurbished national laboratory: this wonderful work having been accomplished with great professionalism guided by a conscientious sense of urgency. This new facility will make it possible to detect TB in sputum in HIV positive patients, for example, on-site in 20 days, compared to the current 3 months required to send samples out of the country and to perform traditional drug susceptibility testing.
Early next year, we have committed to introduce molecular hand-held technologies to identify rifampin and isoniazid resistance within one day.

But as the reference lab is strengthened we need to reinforce the microscopist network and following this year’s FIND re-training program, we will begin next year with LED fluorescent microscopes demonstration projects. By the end of 2008, we hope to be able to say that Lesotho will have implemented the most advanced technologies available today for the diagnosis of tuberculosis.

None of this could have happened without the uninterrupted political commitment of the Ministry of Health and Government of Lesotho, the guidance and support of the World Health Organization in full partnership with the Global Laboratory Initiative, and very importantly, without the steadfast and invaluable support of Partners In Health.

In conclusion, allow me to extend my personal gratitude to Dr. Kekeletso Kao, Director of Laboratory Services under Lesotho’s Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Dr. Salmaan Keshavjee, Deputy Director of PIH, Dr. C. N. Paramasivan, Head of Laboratory Support and Dr. Ajaykumar Thirumala, Technical Consultant, both with FIND, and very importantly, my thanks also to the lab technicians who ultimately made this dream come true.

Thank you.