The role of country leadership in accelerating global malaria elimination

Monday, 21 September 2017

Your Excellency / Royal Highness, King Miswati of Swaziland, I thank you sincerely for lending your influential support to this important gathering.

I also thank my co-hosts, the honourable representatives from the Philippines and Monaco, as well as members of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership, the African Leaders Malaria Alliance and the Asia Pacific Leaders Malaria Alliance – all invaluable partners in the fight against malaria.

Ladies and gentlemen, strong political commitment and country leadership are critical to eliminate a disease which burdens the poorest in our communities. By committing to eliminate malaria, we commit to improve global health, and serve and protect the most vulnerable.

In recent years we have seen Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, the Maldives, Morocco, Sri Lanka and the United Arab Emirates all certified free of malaria. Last year, the 53 countries of the WHO European Region were declared malaria-free. These countries are now working to prevent the disease from re-emerging. And in Moscow, just a few days ago, 10 Central Asia and Caucasus countries signed the Ashgabat Statement, confirming their commitment to prevent the reestablishment of malaria.

I congratulate all of them for their successful country stewardship and encourage others to build on this remarkable progress.

If we are to meet global malaria targets, we need strong leadership in malaria-endemic countries.

In 2015, WHO launched The Global Technical Strategy for Malaria 2016-2030 (GTS) – a framework which includes a near-term milestone for 2020 - the elimination of malaria in at least a further 10 countries.

But we estimate that 21 countries have the potential to eliminate local transmission of malaria by the year 2020.

Excellency and Majesty, in a Region which bears the heaviest toll of cases and deaths from malaria, your homeland, Swaziland, is among six that can meet this elimination target. The others are Algeria, Botswana, Cabo Verde, Comoros, and South Africa.

My respect and appreciation to all of you for your great commitment.
Reaching that elimination milestone requires countries to combine strong political will, technical know-how, the engagement and participation of affected communities, cross-border collaboration, and ensuring access to services for the most vulnerable - leaving no one behind.

It takes the extensive scale-up of proven malaria control tools and closing the gaps in access to prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

And comprehensive technical support, strong plans, effective implementation – this means strong effective national partnerships, and alignment – the strength of comparative advantages working toward a common goal.

Countries need sustained financial support over time to make the dramatic progress we have seen over the last decade; we know funding has plateaued – countries need to increase their own domestic funding as his majesty said, while at the same time working together to increase the international financial opportunity.

On a global level there are significant biological challenges to overcome as well. Insecticide resistance, and parasite resistance to antimalarial drugs, as well as rapid diagnostic tests – are well documented and may stall progress.

New tools will be needed – that is sure. Increased investments in research and development are therefore imperative. Especially if we want to eliminate malaria in high transmission areas.

Ladies and gentlemen, the fight against this deadly disease is far from over. But endemic countries are in the driving seat. We look to them for leadership, action, and WHO is here to support you.

I thank you.