



## PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

### **Health Action International & Global Snakebite Initiative Applaud WHO's Adoption of Snakebite Envenoming as Top-level Neglected Tropical Disease**

***'Category A' status to spark large-scale WHO action to prevent and treat catastrophic snakebite envenoming which kills and injures world's poorest***

AMSTERDAM—Health Action International (HAI) and the Global Snakebite Initiative (GSI) have commended the World Health Organization's (WHO) landmark decision to adopt snakebite envenoming as a 'category A' neglected tropical disease (NTD)—the WHO's highest possible ranking for an NTD.

The category A-NTD listing is expected to spark the development and implementation of a long-overdue global strategy to control, eliminate and eradicate snakebite envenoming by the WHO's Department of Control of NTDs and member states.

"Snakebite envenoming is a catastrophic global health issue that kills and disables hundreds of thousands of people every year and forces victims and their families further into poverty," said Dr Tim Reed, executive director of HAI. "Category A status will help catalyse the fiscal and other support needed for those suffering from this devastating health issue. Concerted action is long overdue and exactly what snakebite victims, their families and their communities need and deserve."

Dr David Williams, chief executive officer of GSI, added: "The development of a WHO-led global strategy for snakebite intervention is the first step in tackling snakebite, which, until now, has been grossly neglected by the global health community and WHO member states. Enormous work must be done to increase awareness about the issue, improve snakebite prevention, and bolster access to safe, effective and affordable antivenoms. This is now more possible than ever with the leadership committed by the WHO."

The WHO announced its decision on 9 June, 2017, based on the recommendation from its Strategic and Technical Advisory Group (STAG) for NTDs. STAG based its recommendation on a strong case for support submitted by the Government of Costa Rica and 17 other WHO member states, including the Dutch government, after finding that it met all [conditions for category A-NTD inclusion](#).

To prevent and treat snakebite in resource-poor settings, HAI is working towards the full rollout of its [action plan](#). The programme, which is partially funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will soon begin training civil society organisations in sub-Saharan Africa to collect and analyse snakebite data and lobby for greater regional, national and international action. HAI will also work with in-country civil society organisations to teach local populations effective prevention and treatment methods.

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**Facts about snakebite envenoming:**

- Approximately 2.7 million people a year develop clinical illness (envenoming) following a venomous snakebite.
- Snakebite envenoming kills about 125,000 people a year and severely injures hundreds of thousands more who often suffer from disfigurement, disability and paralysis resulting in discrimination and social exclusion.
- Impoverished rural dwellers, agricultural workers, working children between 10 and 14 years, and people living in poorly constructed housing and limited access to education and healthcare are at greatest risk of snakebite envenoming.

**Video containing further information on the devastating impact of snakebite:**

<http://bit.ly/1OVUSti>

**For interview requests and further information, please contact:**

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**About the Health Action International**

*Health Action International is the only independent non-governmental organisation entirely dedicated to strengthening pharmaceutical policy to improve public health. Our staff and global network of members have expertise in virtually all areas of medicines policy, including the price, availability and affordability of medicines, clinical data transparency, intellectual property and pharmaceutical marketing. We pursue advocacy at the patient level and up to the highest levels of government through our 'official relations' status with the World Health Organization and respected relationship with the European Medicines Agency.*

**About the Global Snakebite Initiative**

*The Global Snakebite Initiative is a registered non-profit, charitable organisation, based in Australia, but with global membership. It was founded to give a voice to the forgotten victims of snakebite in poor, mostly rural, communities around the world and develop a collaborative framework to address the neglected global tragedy of snakebite envenoming. It aims to improve the understanding, prevention and treatment of snakebite injuries in developing countries and achieve significant improvements in outcomes for snakebite patients.*

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