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Health Action International Reaction to Launch of World Health Organization Strategy on Snakebite Envenoming

GENEVA—*Following the launch today of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) twelve-year strategy to halve the number of deaths and disabilities resulting from snakebite envenoming, Manager of Health Action International’s Snakebite Project, Ben Waldmann, made the following statement:*

“Exactly one year ago, the WHO’s 193 Member States voted in favour of a Resolution that gave snakebite its rightful place as a priority global health issue and provided the WHO with a clear mandate to develop a global strategy.

Today’s strategy launch is a crucial milestone towards ending unnecessary snakebite suffering for so many of the world’s poorest communities. For the last few years, civil society—with HAI in a leading role—has fought tirelessly to put arguably the most neglected of tropical diseases on the political map, and we are proud of the progress that has been made to get to this point. However, the roadmap is not an end in itself, but provides a clear, WHO coordinated, plan of action for national governments, civil society and the wider international community to accelerate the fight to save lives and limbs.

WHO has an essential role to play in the stewardship of the strategy and ensure it meets its main aims of empowering and engaging communities; ensuring safe and effective treatment; strengthening health systems; and increasing partnerships, coordination and resources.

To achieve these objectives, governments cannot be mere onlookers, but must be champions of the strategy, fully embracing its recommendations, and making sure they are enacted and sustained. To make this happen also places the onus on the wider international community—and governments themselves—to provide adequate resources to plan and deliver on the ambitions of the strategy.

HAI has helped set the global agenda on snakebite, but our work is only just beginning. Civil society is uniquely placed to reach the world’s least served populations. We must continue to do our part on the ground by reaching the unreached through education on how to properly respond after a snakebite, and how to prevent it in the first place. We also play the critical role of holding governments, the private sector and WHO accountable and on a path towards achieving universal health coverage (UHC)—that includes forgotten health challenges.

The tragedy of snakebite is that it is preventable, yet so many have died needlessly. We now have a tool in place to end the suffering, but it is up to all of us to make sure it happens.”

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