

Statement to WHO Executive Board 142: Addressing the Burden of Snakebite Envenoming

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Health Action International (HAI) appreciates the opportunity to address the Executive Board on a public health issue of immense gravity. We know the global burden of snakebite envenoming can be minimised with concerted action by the global health community and applaud Member States' determination to address the burden.

HAI welcomes the resolution, which mandates WHO to extend its leadership on snakebite envenoming, finally recognised as a Category A NTD. The resolution also sends a clear message to donors, Member States, and other stakeholders to coordinate affirmative action.

We believe that, to be effective, this resolution must comprehensively tackle the multiple issues that contribute to the totality of the snakebite burden and strengthen health systems, including: The availability of safe, effective, affordable and quality-assured antivenom; community-based interventions on prevention and first-aid treatment; affordable innovations and manufacture; and training of healthcare workers.

HAI supports WHO plans to develop a 'Roadmap' to guide the implementation and evaluation of a comprehensive, multi-actor snakebite control programme. Given the high cost of antivenoms—the only proven therapy for snakebite envenoming—we also support further use of publicly-funded R&D models.

We note, however, the paucity of resource mobilisation and funding commitments to address snakebite envenoming from the global public health community. If not addressed, this funding deficit will continue to perpetuate the neglect and marginalisation of snakebite victims in communities vulnerable to snakebite, constrain snakebite awareness, and hinder the roll-out of awareness, education and training.

Now is the time—today, in this room—to propel a major shift in tackling this most neglected of tropical diseases. This is the next step to finally putting an end to the constant threat of death, disability, disfigurement, debt and destitution wrought by snakebite envenoming.