

Statement to 71st World Health Assembly (WHA71) (24 May, 2018)

Agenda Item 12.1: Resolution on the global snakebite burden

Health Action International (HAI) appreciates the opportunity to address the WHA71 on a serious public health issue of profound importance. HAI has been persistently advocating for snakebite envenoming as a priority on the global health agenda since 2016, when Member States held a side-event at WHA69. We applaud Member States especially those of tropical low- and middle-income countries where the burden of snakebite envenoming is of greatest prevalence for supporting this resolution.

HAI and its partners, the GSI welcome the resolution to strengthen the WHO's mandate for leading on a global action plan to match the WHO's inclusion of snakebite envenoming as an NTD. The resolution sends a clear message to the WHO, Member States, donors and other stakeholders to coordinate and escalate affirmative action.

We believe, that to alleviate the global burden of snakebite comprehensively, this resolution must include: preventative and first-aid measures, availability of safe, effective, affordable and quality-measured antivenom, affordable innovations and manufacture, health systems strengthening – particularly supply chain; and training of health care workers. We encourage further use of publicly-funded R&D models as a reliable, cost-efficient solution to the high price of antivenoms – the only proven therapy for snakebite envenoming.

HAI continues to engage in the formation of the WHO's proposed Roadmap to evaluate and implement a comprehensive and multistakeholder snakebite control programme. We note, that activities to be presented in the WHO's roadmap will urgently require funding by the global public health community. If not addressed, this funding shortfall will continue to perpetuate the neglect and marginalisation of snakebite victims in communities vulnerable to snakebite throughout the tropical and sub-tropical world.

Ladies and Gentlemen, what we are witnessing is a monumental moment, for Member States to finally recognise the public health impact of snakebite envenoming, putting an end to death, disability, disfigurement, debt and destitution.