

19 September, 2018

For immediate release

### **Global Coalition of Health Organisations Announces First-ever International Snakebite Awareness Day**

LONDON—A coalition of organisations working on global health and tropical medicine around the world, including Health Action International, is launching the first-ever International Snakebite Awareness Day to raise awareness of the huge, yet mostly unrecognised, global impact of snakebite.

“We know, first hand, through our Snakebite Programme in Kenya, Uganda and Zambia, the devastating impact that snakebite envenoming is having on victims and their families, communities and countries,” said Ben Waldmann, Health Action International’s Snakebite Programme Manager. “Greater recognition and action on snakebite envenoming is desperately needed to improve snakebite prevention, treatment and rehabilitation—and we hope this day of awareness will help achieve it.”

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 81,000 to 138,000 people around the world die each year from snakebite and up to 400,000 more are left permanently disabled or disfigured as a result of being bitten by venomous snakes. In many communities, these permanent injuries result in people being discriminated against and ostracised. It leads to crippling loss of income, debt, mental health issues, and reduced quality of life.

Tamar Ghosh, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, said: “Snakebites can cause paralysis, fatal haemorrhages, irreversible kidney failure and tissue damage that can lead to disability and amputation. The number of people being bitten by snakes each year could be as high as 5.4 million according to WHO. The fact that snakebite is not being recognised on the global stage must change.”

In 2017, the WHO added snakebite envenoming to its list of highest priority neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). In May this year, the 71<sup>st</sup> World Health Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution calling on the world’s governments and the WHO to tackle the problem.

“Developing a sustainable package of interventions to reduce the burden of death and suffering is a substantial challenge,” said Dr David Williams, CEO of the Global Snakebite Initiative. “The WHO has started the process of preparing a strategic road map that aims at cutting deaths and

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disability by 50% before 2030. But to succeed, the WHO needs support and assistance from a wide range of partners, and in that regard, establishing an International Snakebite Awareness Day is a huge step in the right direction.”

The current crisis is similar to that which other NTDs have already overcome through international cooperation and collective action.

The Coalition hopes that International Snakebite Awareness Day will galvanise action around the issue and add momentum to a call, supported by the late Kofi Annan, for national governments, health agencies, pharmaceutical companies and non-governmental organisations to prioritise snakebite as a global health issue so many thousands of lives are saved.

**Notes to Editors:**

1. The Coalition making the announcement includes: the [Global Snakebite Initiative](#), [Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene](#), [Lillian Lincoln Foundation](#), [The Kofi Annan Foundation](#), [Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine](#), [The International Society on Toxinology](#), [The Wellcome Trust](#), [Health Action International](#), [Médecins sans Frontières](#), [Seqirus](#), [Instituto Clodomiro Picado](#), [Instituto de Biomedicina de Valencia](#) and the [Australian Venom Research Unit](#).
2. Since 1907, the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (RSTMH) has worked towards improving global health. Through our network of members across the world, it facilitates research, shares knowledge, guides lifelong careers, and drives impact. It has almost 1,000 members in 43 countries and a global network of around 20,000 people interested in its work, including speakers, authors, grants applicants and recipients. Its roles include funding and disseminating multidisciplinary research through two peer-reviewed journals and a calendar of meetings and events. It provides grants for United Kingdom and international research and award prizes for excellence in practice and to recognise emerging talent.
3. For quotes and interviews, please contact Ben Waldmann ([ben@haiweb.org](mailto:ben@haiweb.org)), Tamar Ghosh ([Tamar.Ghosh@RSTMH.ORG](mailto:Tamar.Ghosh@RSTMH.ORG)), or David Williams ([david.williams@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:david.williams@unimelb.edu.au)).
4. KOFI ANNAN VIDEO – Kofi Annan became a cherished advocate for snakebite victims and recorded a special message shortly before his untimely passing in August. International Snakebite Awareness Day will be the first time this video will be shared. Please contact James Reid ([tvjimmyreid@yahoo.com](mailto:tvjimmyreid@yahoo.com)).