

## STATEMENT

### STATEMENT BY UNICEF REPRESENTATIVE BJORN LJUNGQVIST AT THE JAPANESE FUNDS HAND-OVER CEREMONY, 15 AUGUST 2005

Last week the world witnessed a series of magnificent Ethiopian victories. Allow me to begin by congratulating the whole Ethiopian athletic team, including our very own UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors Berhane Adere and Kenenisa Bekele, for their triumphant performance at the Helsinki World Championships.

Once more Ethiopia's elite athletes have demonstrated to the world that victory and success are not elusive dreams for this country but can be made real and tangible, executed in stellar style. They have shown with impeccable finesse the power of determination and team work. Everyone who watched the races on television witnessed the magic of their team effort unfold and ensure that the 5 and 10,000 meter distances remained firmly in Ethiopian hands. They have inspired and made us all proud.

Today we are gathered here to witness the handing over of five million dollars, the single largest donation to UNICEF for disease prevention programmes in Ethiopia. Today our champion is the Government of Japan and UNICEF salutes the committed support that we have received over the years from Japan in this critical area of our work to ensure the health and survival of the most vulnerable children and women in Ethiopia. These funds will be used to help wipe out polio and prevent an epidemic of malaria across Ethiopia. If today's champion is the Government of Japan then the team coach to be congratulated is the Minister of Health.

Polio eradication in Ethiopia is another example of highly effective teamwork between all the partners in the polio eradication initiative – from the teams of vaccinators that fan out across the length and breadth of Ethiopia during national immunization days to the campaign coordinating committee who meet in the Ministry of Health and plan these efforts and critically, the donors who provide the ammunition without which the fight to wipe out polio cannot be fought.

Immunization campaigns led by the Federal Ministry of Health since 1996 succeeded in removing all traces of polio from Ethiopia by 2001, when the last case of polio was confirmed in January. With the support of donors like the Government of Japan, effective surveillance systems were put in place and for more than three years Ethiopia was polio free. It was a major victory for Ethiopia.

It was also a result of this success that allowed us to identify the cross border transmission of polio late in 2004.

We were on the verge of eliminating polio from Ethiopia when the virus marched back into Ethiopia from the Sudan. It is now following trade and transport routes into the interior of the country unravelling years of successful polio eradication activities attained at great effort and expense.

Ethiopia has no alternative but to repeat the Herculean task of defeating the virus by going door-to-door across this vast country to immunize every single child under five. The committed support from Japan will help to ensure that Ethiopia will again triumph against polio.

The increased need for polio immunization campaigns is over and above the humanitarian appeal for 2005 and as evidence of a major malaria epidemic during the second half of 2005 is becoming apparent it now seems that malaria control may also need additional funding.

Sharp increases in the number of reported malaria cases in May and June suggest there may be a widespread malaria epidemic later this year. Reports from several regions this year indicate that there are four to ten times the number of malaria cases compared to similar periods during the past two years.

This Japanese contribution, therefore, comes at a critical moment as we prepare to stave off an epidemic and prevent suffering and death among Ethiopia's most vulnerable children and women.

UNICEF is currently working with the Ethiopian Government again with the Minister of Health in head coach, and other bodies to roll out the largest anti-malaria programme in Ethiopia's history. In collaboration with the Ministry and Bureaus of Health and our Roll Back Malaria partners, we are developing the capacity to prevent and respond to malaria epidemics whenever and wherever they occur.

This year, over 2.5 million emergency treatments of the new more effective artemisinin-containing combination therapy (ACTs) have been imported by UNICEF as part of this initiative.

In addition, more than two million insecticide treated nets (ITNs) to protect children against malaria are expected in Ethiopia by the end of September. These nets were paid for by UNICEF and The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and another 500,000 nets are due to arrive by June 2006.

Using Japanese funds UNICEF will procure 600,000 rapid diagnostic tests to dramatically improve treatment of malaria with ACTs. The contribution will also purchase 300,000 insecticide treated nets to protect children and pregnant women from malaria.

As we brace ourselves to confront a possible epidemic this year, we are better armed to prevent the mass deaths that occurred during previous epidemics. Today, Ethiopia has in its arsenal the new and more effective artemisinin-containing combination therapy and this will be the first time that ACTs are used to contain epidemic malaria in Ethiopia. No child or mother need die from malaria with the technology and drugs that are now available.

Close to five hundred thousand Ethiopian children die preventable deaths every year as a result of malnutrition and disease, including malaria.

Six weeks ago we reminded the world of this fact and warned that the number of Ethiopian children dying from malnutrition would double to 170,000 this year if protective measures to safe-guard their lives were not put in place.

Since then UNICEF has received generous donations from Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States for child survival interventions against Ethiopia's humanitarian appeal.

The United Kingdom has donated US\$ 3.8 million for nutritional screening of children and pregnant women, vitamin A supplementation, deworming, immunization against measles, malaria protection and increasing the capacity of health centers in drought prone districts to treat cases of severe malnutrition.

The United States' contribution of US\$ 2 million will strengthen disaster response capacity and provide logistical support for emergency activities, while the Canadian donation of close to US\$ 370,000 will go toward the establishment of therapeutic feeding centers and recovery assistance for victims of flooding in Somali Region.

UNICEF still requires US\$ 36 million in emergency funds to save the lives of the Ethiopia's most vulnerable children. I would like to emphasize particularly the unmet need for water and sanitation interventions, which are proven to be as important as food for the survival of children during emergency situations. Here we remain 82 per cent short of funds.

For further information contact:

Indrias Getachew, UNICEF Communication Section, tel: 251 1 44 43 64, 251 1 51 51 55, cell: 251 9 25 40 18, email: [igetachew@unicef.org](mailto:igetachew@unicef.org)

Andrew Heavens, UNICEF Communication Section, tel : 251 1 51 51 55, cell: 251 9 68 31 90, email: [aheavens@unicef.org](mailto:aheavens@unicef.org)