

Friday, December 15, 2006

Malaria Op-Ed signed by United States Ambassador James D. McGee

Malaria is a deadly mosquito-borne infectious disease that exists across Madagascar and Africa. Slowly, over time, it leaves families, villages and economies devastated. In Madagascar, malaria is one of the most significant causes of illness and death. It is the single highest cause of death among children under five, and malaria infection during pregnancy seriously endangers the life of the mother and her unborn child. Among the adult population, the illness results in substantial loss of productivity and household income. While malaria is often accepted as a consistent and prevalent threat that we must endure, we can work together to end it now.

Today we have new hope in our fight against this disease. At the White House Summit on Malaria yesterday, President Bush named Madagascar as a focus country for the "President's Malaria Initiative" - a \$1.2 billion U.S. commitment to cut in half the number of deaths from malaria here and in 14 other African countries hit hardest by the disease. President Bush also called for an ambitious public-private effort to strengthen and expand malaria control efforts in Africa.

The U.S. initiative ensures that new, effective drugs reach rural clinics to replace failing treatments, provides pregnant women medicine that protects them and their unborn babies, distributes long-lasting, insecticide-treated bed nets that prevent mosquitoes from biting their intended victims, and provides insecticides to spray on the inside walls of homes to kill mosquitoes that transmit the disease.

This malaria effort has already reached more than six million people in Angola, Tanzania and Uganda where malaria is no longer a sad fact of life. A series of highly effective programs will be launched over the next several months to aid millions more people in the other African countries.

This is great news for Madagascar. We can defeat malaria here, even in Madagascar's warm, tropical climates, just as other countries did in the 1950s, when the disease was nearly eradicated. Remember that the disease is curable and preventable.

The key in this battle is our resolve, individual responsibility and leadership. The Government of Madagascar is committed to this critical health issue. We are working side-by-side with Madagascar's Roll Back Malaria (RBM) Partnership with representatives of the Ministry of Health and Family Planning National Malaria Control Program, United States Agency for International Development, World Health Organization, World Bank, UNICEF, Institut Pasteur Madagascar, the Global Fund Country Coordinating Mechanism, nongovernmental organizations, and faith-based and other local service groups, including ASOS, CARE, CRS, ADRA, SALFA, Voahary Salama, RTM and SAF/FJKM.

We now have the tools and the resources. Combined with education, training and resolve, we can defeat this enemy. But to be successful and stop the spread of this disease, individuals must make protecting their family and village a personal priority. From Antsiranana to Toliary, we must band together to help our neighbors. Let's not waste a moment to win the fight against malaria.

James D. McGee