

A: WHO has articulated the value of ACTs and worked assiduously with countries to change their policies in favour of these drugs, which are highly curative when applied properly. The old line

of medicines, chloroquine etc., have encountered parasite resistance. They were inexpensive but didn't work so any expense on them is too high. We are heartened that at least 20 countries in

Africa have adopted ACTs as part of their first-line regimen and we are working with the private sector, and countries such as China to grow more of the plant that provides the raw ingredient for ACTs. ■

Recent news from WHO

- African health leaders gathered in Geneva pledged on **13 January** to step up vaccination programmes in their countries to meet the goal of eradicating polio by the end of 2005. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation said on **27 January** it was providing US\$ 10 million in grants to finance the development of a new polio vaccine against the predominant type-1 strain. The vaccine is due to be introduced in Egypt in May. The Foundation said it was contributing a total of US\$ 750 million over 10 years to the Vaccine Fund, the financing arm of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization which promotes the development of vaccines for the world's poorest countries.
- The Millennium Project, an independent advisory body to the United Nations, proposed a series of specific cost-effective measures on **17 January** that could halve extreme poverty and radically improve the lives of one billion people in poor countries by 2015. Dr LEE Jong-wook, WHO Director-General, called on wealthy nations to summon up the political will and resources to help to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.
- This year's Executive Board meeting in Geneva from **17 to 25 January** reviewed WHO's response to the tsunami crisis in south-east Asia and the health agency's role in emergencies in general. The 32-member Board proposed a resolution on being prepared for emergencies and minimizing the destructive effect of conflict or natural disasters on health systems.
- The Board also discussed whether WHO's 192 Member States were adequately prepared for an influenza epidemic. Member States will consider draft resolutions on influenza preparedness, alcohol, blood safety and WHO's e-health project at the World Health Assembly **16–25 May**.
- The Board confirmed the appointment of a new Regional Director for Africa, Dr Luis Gomes Sambo, and a second term for Dr Marc Danzon, WHO's Regional Director for Europe. The Board also discussed WHO's cooperation with nongovernmental organizations. For more information, please see: http://www.who.int/gb/eb/e_eb115.html
- In a major drive to reach millions more readers, WHO expanded its web site on **17 January** to provide navigation and the top-level content pages in Arabic, Chinese and Russian in addition to the other three official UN languages: English, French and Spanish (see illustration).
- WHO said on **26 January** that the target for 2004 had been met in the '3 by 5' campaign to get three million people with HIV/AIDS in developing and transition countries on antiretroviral treatment (ARV) by the end of 2005. The number of patients receiving this life-saving treatment in those countries rose to about 700 000 from 440 000 in July 2004, boosted by progress in sub-Saharan Africa, WHO and UNAIDS said. WHO warned that obstacles remained to getting treatment to the remaining 2.3 million people, including the high cost of ARV medicines and an acute shortage of doctors and nurses in countries with the highest HIV/AIDS burden.
- WHO launched a project on **26 January** that aims to produce one or more works on the role of WHO in the history of global health, including a complete history of the Organization itself. WHO's Global Health Histories initiative plans to publish the first of these works to coincide with WHO's 60th anniversary in 2008.
- Authorities in Zimbabwe have opened an investigation into the death of WHO staffer Lisa Véron, 30, in a roadside attack on **10 January** in the capital Harare. Véron, who held dual Swiss and British nationality, had been posted to the WHO African Regional Office in Harare in August 2004 to help to get more patients in poor countries on the DOTS anti-tuberculosis strategy. She joined WHO in 2000 and had been a technical officer for the Tuberculosis Strategy and Operations team of the Stop TB Department since 2002. Department Director Dr Mario Ravigione said: "The loss of such a remarkable and wonderful person has deeply shocked all her colleagues".
- At a meeting from **31 January to 4 February** Member States proposed setting up a secretariat, an independent body based at WHO that will help them implement tough anti-tobacco control measures under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. They also discussed screening activists to prevent tobacco companies infiltrating meetings of the future secretariat.
- About 50 experts from developing and industrialized countries presented and discussed their HIV vaccine research and development efforts at the first WHO-UNAIDS Meeting of Global Partners Promoting HIV Vaccine Research and Development in Montreux, Switzerland **2–3 February**.
- Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan — the three Asian countries where polio is still endemic — halved the number of their polio cases last year. The countries are on target to meet global polio eradication goals by the end of this year, WHO said on **4 February**.
- WHO made its annual recommendations on the formulation of the influenza vaccine for the Northern Hemisphere 2005–06 season on **11 February**. These are used by pharmaceutical manufacturers to update the composition of the influenza vaccines they produce. WHO will make its recommendations for the Southern Hemisphere in September.
- WHO sets up a Commission on Social Determinants for Health on **18 March**, in a new initiative to tackle factors affecting health, such as wealth, education, ethnicity, gender and job. For more details, see: http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/



For more about these and other WHO news items please see: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/en/>