Recent news from WHO

• WHO Director-General LEE Jong-wook visited parts of Pakistan that were affected by the 8 October 2005 earthquake. He praised the response of the government and the international community to the disaster, but said that WHO still needs US$ 13 million, almost half of the US$ 27 million initially requested to help people there survive the winter. Hundreds of thousands of people still need better shelter, the cold and the crowded conditions in some camps increase the risk of respiratory infections, and getting health care to people who live high in the mountains is a major challenge.

• WHO published a new report, Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Health Synthesis, on 9 December, on the complex links between preserving healthy and biodiverse natural ecosystems and protecting human health. To read the report, please see: http://www.who.int/globalchange/ecosystems/ecosystems05/en/

• Every year millions of people are pushed into poverty because of high medical costs paid for out of their own pockets. Experts from 40 countries at a conference in Berlin looked at ways to provide social protection for people who cannot afford these costs and to promote investment in health. The 5–7 December meeting was convened by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit GmbH, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Labour Organization and WHO.

• WHO and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization made it clear on 5 December that it is safe to eat chicken, eggs and other poultry products as long as they are properly cooked. They issued this advice to national food safety authorities after sales of poultry products fell over consumer fears that these products might be infected with a bird flu virus.

• Lesotho launched a groundbreaking campaign on World AIDS Day, 1 December, to encourage everyone in the southern African country to get tested for HIV. Lesotho is offering confidential and voluntary HIV testing and counselling door-to-door with the goal of reaching all households in Lesotho by the end of 2007.

• With an additional US $1 billion per year, immunization could save 10 million more lives in a decade. With this increased investment, more than 70 million children in the world’s poorest countries would be protected each year against 14 major childhood diseases by 2015, according to a WHO/UNICEF study presented at the 7–9 December meeting of representatives of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI).

For more about these and other WHO news items please see: http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/2005/en/index.html