

10TH MEETING OF GET2020 REPORT

MAKING PROGRESS
TOWARD THE GLOBAL ELIMINATION OF
BLINDING TRACHOMA

**WHO Alliance for the Global Elimination
of Blinding Trachoma by 2020**



**World Health
Organization**

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On the occasion of the Tenth meeting of the WHO Alliance for the Global Elimination of Blinding Trachoma, Dr Lee Jong-wook, Director-General of the World Health Organization, said:

“This is very encouraging progress. If countries continue at this rate, the global goal to eliminate blinding trachoma as a public health problem by 2020 can be achieved.”

Dr Lee joined the WHO GET2020 participants at the opening reception on 10 April 2006.



Dr Lee died on 22 May 2006. This report is dedicated to the memory of his devotion to the vision of WHO – a world where health is a right for all.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The tenth annual meeting of the WHO Alliance for the Global Elimination of Blinding Trachoma by the Year 2020 (GET 2020) was held at the headquarters of the World Health Organization (WHO), Geneva, from 10 to 12 April 2006. The meeting was attended by 62 participants, of whom 30 were national coordinators for trachoma control programmes (Annex1).

Dr Robert Beaglehole, Director, Department of Chronic Diseases and Health Promotion, WHO, opened the meeting on behalf of the Director-General. Welcoming the participants, he drew attention to the impressive expansion of the WHO Alliance and to the considerable progress being made by many countries in eliminating blinding trachoma. On behalf of the Organization, he acknowledged the valuable contributions being made to national efforts by the international and bilateral partners in the WHO Alliance, especially Pfizer Inc., Corporate Philanthropy, for its long-term commitment to the provision of azithromycin (Zithromax) to countries endemic for the disease, through the International Trachoma Initiative (ITI). The members of the WHO Alliance should publicize their commendable successes in dealing effectively with a disease that affected the poorest among poor people. A March 2006 report by the World Bank entitled *Reaching the poor* had identified successes in similar programmes that were reaching those whose need was greatest yet who were the most difficult to reach. WHO was now approaching the control of neglected tropical diseases across the whole Organization. All those various efforts would have a significant impact on the control of the whole range of chronic diseases, which predominantly affected low- and middle-income countries.

Dr Serge Resnikoff, Coordinator of Chronic Diseases Prevention and Management, WHO, said that the first meeting of the WHO Alliance in 1997 had been attended by just four countries and 47 external participants, compared with 38 countries and more than 80 external participants a decade later. He paid tribute to the many individuals who had contributed to the WHO Alliance over that period, and to the scientific and operational partners for the part they had played, especially the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), ITI, and Pfizer. Progress in trachoma control since 1997 had been significant, first and foremost thanks to efforts by countries, which also had many other public health problems to face. Nevertheless, challenges remained, in particular in relation to intersectoral collaboration – an aspect highlighted at the very first meeting of the WHO Alliance – and the monitoring and evaluation of national trachoma control programmes, which were difficult to achieve but which were vital for further progress towards elimination of blinding trachoma. Dr Catherine Le Galès-Camus, Assistant Director-General, WHO, who was able to join the meeting for its final session, assured the participants of WHO's continuing commitment to the WHO Alliance. WHO acknowledged with appreciation the valuable contributions made by the various partners. Now in its tenth meeting, the Alliance was at a key moment in its history. The country reports were indicating the remarkable progress being made in trachoma control in many parts of the world, and it was an appropriate time to undertake a critical evaluation of trachoma control objectives and achievements. The conclusions and recommendations adopted at the meeting would establish a road map for future activities and provide guidance to WHO and the other partners on their roles and responsibilities. The WHO Alliance had built remarkable public-private partnerships, bringing together national coordinators, technical experts, WHO, NGOs and donors, with strong support from the pharmaceutical industry. Its excellent collaborative work should serve as a model for other WHO programmes. Success would only come through cooperation. It was to be hoped that country representatives would share the results of their work with delegates from other Member States at the Fifty-ninth World Health Assembly in May 2006, at which an important draft resolution on prevention of blindness would be considered.¹

¹ Resolution WHA59.25 on prevention of avoidable blindness and visual impairment was adopted at the Fifty-ninth World Health Assembly in May 2006.

Dr Abdou Amza (National Coordinator, Niger) was elected Chairman and Ms Rebecca Teel Daou (Lions Club International Foundation) Vice-Chairman. Dr Grace E.B. Saguti (National Coordinator, United Republic of Tanzania) and Mr Chip Morgan (Operation Eyesight) were elected Rapporteurs.

The Agenda was adopted, with modifications to the list of countries presenting reports under item 2 (Annex 2).

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