

# Press release

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## COMMUNITY APPROACH IS KEY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TB, SAY RED CROSS

### *RED CROSS AND ASTRAZENECA UNVEIL NEW GLOBAL TB PARTNERSHIP*

Effective community-based action is key to winning the fight against Tuberculosis (TB, the British Red Cross said today, ahead of World TB Day (24<sup>th</sup> March). Multi-drug resistance and co-infection with HIV are two major challenges to the control of TB, and the charity believes that effective responses to TB must include the participation of affected people, their families and communities. At the same time, the charity, announced a new, three-year, global partnership with leading pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca to combat TB at community level in Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

In Central Asia, where the Red Cross has been working with the support of AstraZeneca for four years, over 300,000 people at risk of TB have been reached through media campaigns and health education sessions in schools and public places. Furthermore, an increasing number of diagnosed patients are now completing their treatment, due to the care and support of the dedicated Red Cross and Red Crescent nurses and volunteers.

The new partnership with AstraZeneca, worth over £600,000, will help ensure that community-based work continues and extends to sub-Saharan Africa in 2007 to tackle the threat of TB and TB/HIV co-infection. It aims to improve awareness and education about the disease, promote early diagnosis, and provide psychological support and homecare for very weak patients through Red Cross trained volunteers working within their own communities.

Matthias Schmale, international director at the British Red Cross, said: "By focusing on some of the most vulnerable people with TB and raising awareness through community mobilisation, we have seen an increase in the numbers of people successfully completing treatment. We know this approach works and with AstraZeneca's generous contribution, we can continue to support the TB work of National Red Crescent Societies in Central Asia and begin to roll it out in other high burden countries. "

Schmale adds; “TB is the leading killer of people infected with HIV<sup>1</sup>, so by strengthening the TB component within existing HIV projects in countries like South Africa and Lesotho, we hope to make a real impact. ”

David Brennan, chief executive officer, AstraZeneca said: “AstraZeneca is proud to expand its support to the British Red Cross in its work to combat TB. This new partnership is consistent with our own efforts to find new treatments for this significant healthcare challenge affecting communities world-wide.”

Community-based care can take many forms. In Kyrgyzstan, in Central Asia, for example, people diagnosed with TB can come to a Red Cross canteen daily to receive hot meals and take their medication under supervision. This reduces the sense of isolation that is common, as well as increasing motivation to complete their course of treatment. It is particularly important because the strong medication requires a patient to be well nourished and should be taken with food to work effectively.

Red Cross nurses and volunteers also make home visits to some of the most vulnerable people with TB such as the elderly. They bring hygiene packs (containing soap, washing powder, toothpaste etc) or food parcels to give practical support to the person whilst they undergo the long course of treatment, which can have unpleasant side effects. The home visits themselves provide emotional support for people who may often feel de-motivated and socially isolated.

Central to all Red Cross community-based care is the principle that the clients are involved in their own care and recovery. Red Cross volunteers who have, themselves, lived through treatment are educating, caring for and supporting others. They can relate to these people by drawing on their own personal experiences of the disease.

## ENDS

### Notes to editors

For all media enquiries and interview requests please contact Anna Bifield 0207 877 7045

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### Key facts on Tuberculosis (TB)

- Everyday TB claims 5000 lives, the highest it has ever been (UNAIDS 2006)
- Left untreated, each person with active TB disease will infect on average between 10 and 15 people every year (StopTB)
- Someone in the world is newly infected with TB bacilli every second (StopTB)
- Overall, one-third of the world's population is currently infected with the TB bacillus (StopTB)
- Worldwide 14 million people are co-infected with TB and HIV, and 70% of these are concentrated in Africa. (UNAIDS/WHO 2006)

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The British Red Cross helps people in crisis, whoever and wherever they are. We are part of a global voluntary network, responding to conflicts, natural disasters and individual emergencies. We enable vulnerable people in the UK and abroad to prepare for and withstand emergencies in

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<sup>1</sup> [www.StopTB.org](http://www.StopTB.org) (2007)

their own communities. And when the crisis is over, we help them to recover and move on with their lives.