Press Release

500 Million People Await

World Health Assembly Decision on Viral Hepatitis

World Hepatitis Alliance urges governments to support WHO resolution as global hepatitis community mark third annual World Hepatitis Day

Switzerland, Geneva. Monday 17th May, 2010 – The World Hepatitis Alliance today called on health ministers and governments to support the adoption of an urgently needed World Health Organization (WHO) resolution on viral hepatitis, being debated during the 63rd World Health Assembly, starting in Geneva today.

Hundreds of patient groups await the World Health Assembly's decision as they prepare to mark the third annual World Hepatitis Day on 19 May. If adopted, the resolution would provide global endorsement of World Hepatitis Day as the primary focus for national and international awareness-raising efforts. Recently published research from the World Hepatitis Alliance shows that only a minority of governments currently fund hepatitis B and C awareness activities and much more needs to be done to tackle two diseases that kill one million people a year.

"Despite the huge disease burden and death toll, viral hepatitis has never before been comprehensively addressed by the global community" commented Charles Gore, President of the World Hepatitis Alliance. "The World Health Assembly, taking place this week, is an important opportunity and on behalf of every single man, woman and child who has had their lives torn apart by these devastating diseases I urge governments of the world to fully support the WHO resolution."

Co-sponsored by Brazil, Indonesia and Colombia and agreed by the WHO Executive Board, the resolution recognises the impact of the diseases globally and proposes a robust framework for international action to improve awareness, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of both hepatitis B and C.

Press Release

"Much more can be done to reduce the devastating effects of viral hepatitis B and C worldwide. A unified approach by world governments is the most effective way to deliver viral hepatitis prevention and control programmes" explained Dr. Michael Houghton, co-discoverer of the hepatitis C virus and member of the World Hepatitis Alliance Public Health Panel. "A positive outcome from the World Health Assembly this week would be a major milestone and has the very real potential to save millions of lives."

The consideration of the resolution comes against the background of a new report, 'Viral Hepatitis: Global Policy', published one month ago by the World Hepatitis Alliance. Commissioned by the WHO, this unprecedented research highlights that despite good examples of what can be achieved in preventing and controlling viral hepatitis, there is enormous disparity across the world with many countries acknowledging that existing policies need strengthening. It does, however, also reveal a clear consensus for action, with the vast majority of countries agreeing that viral hepatitis is an urgent public health issue and requesting leadership from the WHO in tackling it.

Did You Know?

- Approximately 500 million people worldwide are infected with hepatitis B or C[1]
- This is over 10 times the number infected with HIV/AIDS[2]
- Over 50% of people infected with viral hepatitis live in countries where there is no free testing[3]
- 41% of the global population do not have access to government funded treatment[3]
- Between them hepatitis B and C kill one million people a year[1]
- One in every three people on the planet has been exposed to either or both viruses

World Hepatitis Alliance

The World Hepatitis Alliance provides global leadership and supports action that will halt the death toll and improve the lives of people living with chronic viral hepatitis B and C. Through better awareness, prevention, care, support and access to treatment, our ultimate goal is to work with governments to eradicate these diseases from the planet.

The World Hepatitis Alliance is a Non-Governmental Organisation representing more than 280 hepatitis B and C patient groups from around the world. The World Hepatitis Alliance is governed

by a representative board elected by patient groups from seven world regions: Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, Africa, North America, Latin America, Australasia and Western Pacific. For further information visit: www.worldhepatitisalliance.org

World Hepatitis Alliance – Seeking a world without viral hepatitis B and C.

World Hepatitis Day

The third annual World Hepatitis Day will take place on Wednesday 19 May 2010, as part of an ongoing campaign launched by the World Hepatitis Alliance in 2008. An entirely patient-led initiative, the long-term objective of the World Hepatitis Day campaign is to prevent new infections and to deliver real improvements in health outcomes for people living with hepatitis B and C.

Since World Hepatitis Day was launched in 2008, the **'Am I Number 12?'** awareness campaign has been adopted by countries all over the world. **'Am I Number 12?'** is a simple message designed to communicate the fact that one in 12 people worldwide is living with viral hepatitis B or C. In 2010, the **'Am I Number 12?'** campaign will be supported with a new communication theme, **'This is hepatitis…'**, which aims to tell the global human story of viral hepatitis, focusing on the real-life impact of these diseases to generate increased understanding among the general public.

For further information or to speak to a World Hepatitis Alliance spokesperson:

Lorna Croft
T: +44 (0) 207 395 7067
E: contact@worldhepatitisalliance.org

Raquel José
T: +44 (0) 7920 202120
E: raquel.jose@worldhepatitisalliance.org

References

[1] World Health Organization. Viral hepatitis: Report by the Secretariat http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB126/B126_15-en.pdf (accessed 30 April, 2010)

[2] World Health Organization. Global summary of the AIDS epidemic. http://data.unaids.org/pub/Report/2009/JC1700_Epi_Update_2009_en.pdf (accessed 30 April, 2010)

[3] Viral Hepatitis: Global Policy. World Hepatitis Alliance in conjunction with the World Health Organization: http://www.worldhepatitisalliance.org/en/Policy/2010PolicyReport.aspx (accessed 26 April, 2010)