



April 24, 2009

OP-ED FOR WORLD MALARIA DAY

**By Ms. Marcia S. Bernicat
Ambassador of the United States of America
to the Republics of Senegal and Guinea-Bissau**

For about half the world's population, malaria remains one of the greatest threats to public health. It is a disease that causes poverty, disrupts the livelihood of families, and far too often, steals the future of lives in Africa, the Amazon, the Mekong Delta region of Southeast Asia and elsewhere. In tropical Africa alone, the disease kills nearly 3,000 people each day. Young children and pregnant women are at greatest risk.

World Malaria Day is observed April 25 to call attention to the disease and to mobilize action to combat it. The U.S. has taken extraordinary steps to curb the spread of this preventable and curable disease.

The President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) is led and implemented by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) with the assistance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the collaboration of the US Peace Corps. It represents an historic \$1.2 billion, five-year expansion of U.S. government resources to fight malaria in Africa. In Senegal, the PMI will invest approximately \$72 dollars in key interventions over 4 years.

The strategy is straightforward. First, prevention: PMI supports indoor residual spraying to keep deadly mosquitoes at bay, the distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets to provide protection from malaria-carrying mosquitoes, and preventive malaria treatment to expectant mothers during pregnancy. For the past two years, PMI has distributed nearly 1.5 million free or subsidized nets in Senegal. And, the health districts of Richard Toll, Velingara and Nioro have benefited from indoor residual spraying, protecting more than 645,000 people.

Second, treatment: PMI distributes new and highly effective medicines and trains health workers on the proper use of those medicines. Current PMI support in Senegal has resulted in 3,500 community health workers being trained to diagnose and treat cases of uncomplicated malaria, bringing effective treatment much closer to the people who need it.

Working with national governments and other donors, PMI has helped to rapidly scale up these malaria prevention and treatment measures across 15 countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

During the third year of implementation, the United States reached more than 32 million people with malaria prevention and treatment measures in Africa. In 2008, PMI procured more than 6.4 million long-lasting mosquito nets for free distribution to pregnant women and young children and a total of 15.6 million anti-malarial drug treatments. Indoor residual spraying activities covered six million houses and protected nearly 25 million people at risk of malaria.

In Senegal we are beginning to see signs of reduction in the proportion of people infected with malaria. Across the country, people are talking about how there is much less illness and death due to malaria than in the past. The introduction of rapid diagnostic tests allows us to finally know the true burden of malaria, and effective treatment is available in even the most remote communities.

Malaria control programs must be sustainable. We are focusing on building capacity within host countries by training people to manage, deliver, and support the delivery of health services, which will be critical for sustained successes against infectious diseases.

Partnerships with host country governments, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the World Bank Booster Program for Malaria Control, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and others have made these successes possible. PMI is particularly proud of its relationship with the Senegal National Malaria Control Program and salutes the extraordinary efforts of this dynamic team.

Partnerships with faith-based and community organizations are especially valuable to malaria control efforts because of the credibility these groups have within their communities, their ability to reach the grassroots level, and their capacity to mobilize significant numbers of volunteers.

Across Senegal and around the world, children and their families are sleeping under bed nets; local groups are teaching mothers to take anti-malarial drugs when they are pregnant and seek proper treatment for their sick children. In schools and villages, community centers and places of worship, clinics, and hospitals, optimism is growing that we can and will succeed. We share that optimism. On World Malaria Day, the United States will continue to galvanize action and spur grassroots and private sector efforts to control the disease.