

Challenge TB Launch and Inauguration of a TB Treatment Center and TB Culture Laboratories

Remarks by U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission Peter Vrooman

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Indemen aderachu! It is a great pleasure to be here on this beautiful morning to participate in this celebration. One of my favorite parts of living here in Ethiopia is to come and visit places like this. It is a very nice facility!

I want to thank ALERT's and St. Peter's hospital staffs for the amazing work you are all doing. The quality of your teams and the dedication to truly make a difference in people's lives is clearly demonstrated here.

So in this regard, I am excited that a significant part of today's ceremony is for me to hand over the newly renovated TB treatment center and culture laboratories at ALERT and St. Peter's hospitals to the Ministry of Health.

With the renovated multidrug-resistant, or MDR-TB outpatient department and TB culture laboratory right next to the existing MDR-TB ward, patients can now receive quality MDR-TB services in one place. This will significantly raise the quality of care in Ethiopia.

These facilities are just two examples of the significant contributions through USAID's TB-CARE I project to expand MDR-TB treatment services and establish centers of excellence, which serve as the national reference centers for the country.

Nonetheless, despite our combined efforts, Ethiopia still remains a high TB and MDR-TB burden country. While TB case notification rates have declined over the past four years, it is still impressive to note that Ethiopia identified and referred over 550,000 cases of all forms of TB nationally for care and treatment.

On the positive side, we helped identify over 115,000 people with TB last year and I am happy to say that the treatment success rate for these detected patients in our supported areas has exceeded 90 percent!

But on the minus side, the Government of Ethiopia estimates that there are still almost 100,000 people who are infected, but not found. And we need to find them because the illness is not just a risk to them, but also to their community.

So the U.S. Government will continue to work closely with the Ministry of Health and regional bureaus to increase the detection rate so that those affected can begin a proper course of treatment. This is vitally important!

USAID's TB-focused activities—TB-CARE, HEAL TB and the Private Health Sector Program—along with our integrated TB/HIV PEPFAR activities, have contributed to government efforts to expand MDR-TB

prevention, diagnosis, and treatment as well as the encouraging progress over the last few years.

Today, we commemorate the achievements Ethiopia has made in TB control, and the investments made to control TB and MDR-TB since the TB-CARE project started in 2011.

At the end of 2014, more than 33 MDR-TB treatment initiation centers had opened. These, in turn, were linked to more than 330 follow-up centers across the country and USAID activities have contributed significantly the expansion of these facilities, like the ones we are inaugurating today.

This impressive expansion of infrastructure and services has led to the enrollment of more than 2,000 MDR-TB patients, a substantial increase in the last five years.

With a 72 percent success rate for patients who completed MDR-TB treatment, that means that more than 1,400 people are alive today because they had access to treatment.

The contribution of USAID and partners has been significant in achieving these results. The support has significantly strengthened program management and ability at all levels, resulting in improved patient treatment and care.

So while today's ceremony involves the end of USAID's TB-CARE project, it is not the end of our efforts to reduce the TB burden in Ethiopia. Today is also a ceremony to launch USAID's follow-on project, Challenge TB.

Building on the success of TB-CARE, the focus of Challenge TB will shift to the regions and cities to address specific weaknesses, such as increasing support for urban TB activities.

Challenge TB will further strengthen and expand the services at the national level as well as in SNNP and Tigray regions and the urban poor with more focus on key populations disproportionately affected by TB, TB/HIV and MDR-TB.

The launching of Challenge TB is a testament to our commitment, engagement and continuous contribution to the Government of Ethiopia's efforts to control TB. It is through our strong and committed partners that we have been able to translate our support into action and the U.S. Government will continue to support and build upon what we have accomplished so far.

I would like to thank the Ministry of Health, regional health bureaus and all health staff and stakeholders involved in these efforts.

Special appreciation goes to the staff of both ALERT and St. Peter's hospitals for your pioneering work in the fight against MDR-TB and the strong partnership and cooperation in our joint efforts to combat this deadly disease.

Through our strong partnership and hard work, together we will achieve our goal of eliminating TB from Ethiopia and all over the world.

Thank you again for your invitation to participate in this exciting endeavor and I wish you all the greatest success. Amasegenalehu.