

## **We cannot let another child die needlessly**

The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) and The Vaccine Fund are reporting results that have far surpassed expectations for a relatively new initiative. GAVI and its partners in the countries estimate that their support to vaccination and the introduction of new vaccines will save more than 500,000 lives.

In the last four years, 35.5 million children have been vaccinated against hepatitis B, six million against Hib, 2.7 million against yellow fever, eight million more have access to such basic vaccines as diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis and 47 countries have received financial support to improve their healthcare infrastructure and health systems, paving the way for delivery of new vaccines; including someday an HIV AIDS vaccine. The list of successes is long, but when child survival is concerned, one must look towards the future and the challenges of tomorrow and not solely at achievements however exemplary they may be.

More than 30 million children born annually still do not receive any immunization whatsoever. For lack of basic vaccination two to three million children will die this year from diseases that we have the technology to prevent. A similar number of people will die of AIDS or AIDS-related complications, mostly young adults. This lack of immunization and basic healthcare results in the death of about 8,000 children every day. This is the equivalent of 20 jumbo jets filled with passengers crashing, today, tomorrow, the day after and every single day of the year. Can you imagine the headlines? Would the world tolerate this?

This is not just a human and immoral catastrophe which can be so easily prevented. It is also an economic and social disaster. Economies will not grow and societies will not prosper if their children become ill and die in early childhood. The goal of immunizing the world's children is a relatively simple one, but it has broad socio-economic implications. Said Nelson Mandela, Chairman of the Board of The Vaccine Fund, "without safe and healthy children, there is no economic development." The Millennium Development Goals and the pledges made by the developed countries to reduce by two third the mortality of children under the age of 5 by 2015 will never be reached if we do not continue to give immunization a big boost.

The mission of GAVI and The Vaccine Fund is life critical. Our goal is very clear: to address the gross inequities in child health still existing in the world today. Life or death for a young child too often depends on whether he is born in a country where vaccines are available or not. The Vaccine Fund's job is to raise new resources so that the GAVI partners can protect the lives of more children. We want to save a million more children from 2004 to 2006. It only takes \$30 dollars to immunize a child with vaccines that most of us take for granted. Yet we will not have all the necessary resources to fulfil all of our commitments to countries that need our assistance for immunization and other healthcare services.

By continuing to provide the infrastructure to improve healthcare systems and deliver existing life-saving vaccines GAVI and The Vaccine Fund are also laying the groundwork for future vaccines and immunization programs against such killers as AIDS and malaria.

To borrow a word from the American poet Allen Ginsberg, we must raise and maintain a collective HOWL regarding such inequity, such unfairness that would deny health and life itself to the most innocent and vulnerable among us.

We call on the people of the developed world, on every government or private citizen to face-up to their individual and collective responsibilities, and rise-up to the occasion to provide resources and political will to save another million children.

We will not let another child die needlessly.

Queen Rania of Jordan; Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and Jens Stoltenberg, former Prime Minister of Norway, are members of the Board of Directors of The Vaccine Fund.