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PRESS RELEASE

International Leaders on Immunization Call for Increased Political Will and Resources to Help Reach Global Goals

Lyon, France, 11 October 2004—After providing support to reach nearly 45 million of the world's poorest children with new vaccines in their first four years of existence, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) and The Vaccine Fund today called for increased political and financial commitment to immunization.

Speaking at the World Vaccine Congress in Lyon, Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF and Jacques-François Martin, President of The Vaccine Fund, said that new funds are urgently needed to stem the tide of premature and completely preventable deaths for the world's most vulnerable children. "Despite great progress in the past fifty years in some parts of the world, much more still needs to be done in others. Today, 1 out of every 6 children born in sub-Saharan African dies before the age of five, compared to 1 out of every 143 children in the industrialized countries," said Bellamy.

"We need to raise more funds and bring additional public and private resources to the table if we are to meet the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals – especially the target aimed at reducing the number of children who die every year,"¹ added Martin. "Unless the amount of available aid increases dramatically and, as importantly, is used effectively, these goals will end up as just another set of worthy but unmet commitments."

In many of the poorest countries today, the child mortality goal is far from being met. WHO and UNICEF estimate that on current trends, the immunization coverage rates needed to meet the goal will not be reached before 2037 – more than two decades beyond the target date.

Already immunization prevents millions of deaths a year among children under five as well as reducing the costs of treatment and disability caused by infectious disease. But in some countries, efforts to increase immunization coverage are being hampered by weak health systems, conflict, and the unaffordable cost of some vaccines in low-income countries.

Calling on leaders of industrialized countries to demonstrate the political will to contribute new funding, Martin stressed that more than 30 million children still miss out on immunization during their first year of life, and that vaccine-preventable diseases kill more than 2 million people every year, including 1.5 million children. Pointing to advances in research, Martin also noted that more than 2 million additional deaths could be averted for diseases for which vaccines are currently under development, such as meningococcal disease, pneumococcal disease, and rotavirus diarrhoea.

Since 2000, GAVI/The Vaccine Fund has disbursed US\$ 429 million to 70 countries, and reached more than 9 million more children with basic vaccines² and nearly 45 million more children with new vaccines.³ Thanks to a dramatically rapid start-up, The Vaccine Fund had committed about 95% of its available resources by the end of 2003.

¹ To reduce under-five child mortality by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015

² Including diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, BCG, measles and polio

³ Including hepatitis B, Hib and yellow fever



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By encouraging countries to design their own grant applications and attaching financing to measurable results, the GAVI/The Vaccine Fund process promotes local ownership of programmes and strengthens local expertise. As a result, many countries have shown dramatic advances in expanding immunization coverage and improving their health systems outreach.

“We know that positive change is possible,” said Bellamy. “Let us now ensure that the resources needed to make this happen are available where they are most needed.”

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About GAVI and The Vaccine Fund: The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) is a public-private partnership focused on increasing access to vaccines among children in poor countries. Partners include national governments, UNICEF, WHO, The World Bank, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the vaccine industry, public health institutions and NGOs. The Vaccine Fund is the financing resource created to support the GAVI immunization goals, providing financial support directly to low-income countries to strengthen their health delivery and immunization services and to purchase new and under-used vaccines.

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