



PRESS RELEASE

Ref No UNAMSIL/PIO/PR/ 173/2004

17 September 2004

WHO, MANO RIVER UNION COUNTRIES MEET ON LASSA FEVER CONTROL

Freetown, Sierra Leone – Health Ministers from Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia on Tuesday 14 February ended a two-day meeting on Lassa Fever prevention and control in the Mano River Union (MRU) countries with the aim of adopting a joint sub-regional strategy to curb the disease that has left several dead in the region.

Organised by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the meeting also brought together the organisation's country directors in the three MRU countries and from its headquarters, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Health in Nigeria and Ghana, United Nations Missions in Sierra Leone and Liberia, local UN agencies and non-governmental organizations.

In a prepared statement read on his behalf, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General (SRSG) for Sierra Leone, Ambassador Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago said the lack of education was one major reason the disease had wreaked so much havoc on the region.

The SRSG said, "education is the cornerstone of the prevention and treatment of the disease," adding that such education should target not only the public but medical staff and leaders as well. He said "a unified concerted effort" at all levels was needed if the disease, which he said had killed seven UN peacekeepers in Sierra Leone with three confirmed to be living with it and another four showing clinical symptoms, was to be defeated.

At the end of the conference, the three MRU Ministers of Health signed a Declaration, endorsed by their partners, agreeing to implement a 4-year strategy for their countries, and including potentially affected countries in the region. They also agreed to hold an annual meeting rotating among the three, collaborate in the exchange of scientific information and materials, patient management in such areas as standardized clinical case definition and common treatment guidelines.

The meeting also agreed the setting-up of "strategically placed Lassa Fever treatment centers within each country of the Sub-Region", a sub-regional panel of experts and an "Epidemic Response Team". They also encouraged the area of surveillance "to respond to the needs of Lassa Fever", logistics management and support for emergency preparedness as well as an information, education and communication component.

MEDIA CONTACT: Kemal SAIKI, Chief Public Information, Spokesman

☎ +232-22-295-583 ☎ Mobile +232-076-692-801 Email: saiki@un.org

MEDIA CONTACT: Sharon McPHERSON, Head Media Relations Unit

☎ +232-22-295-136 ☎ Mobile +232-076-757-802 Email: mcpherson1@un.org