Global tuberculosis epidemic cannot be ended unless it is eliminated in India

Progress on a new vaccine and focus on prevention announced at the opening of the 50th Union World Conference on Lung Health in Hyderabad, India

Wednesday, 30 October, 2019 (Paris, France; Hyderabad, India) – The 50th Union World Conference on Lung Health taking place in Hyderabad, India, has opened with a call to end the emergency of the global tuberculosis (TB) epidemic, now responsible for killing some 1.5 million people each year.

“Ending the TB emergency starts right here in India,” said José Luis Castro, Executive Director of The International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union), convener of the Union World Conference, which is being held for the first time in India in half a century. The Indian government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has committed to eliminate TB in India by 2025, five years ahead of the official UN target.

“One in four people living with TB are in India – so it is clear that we cannot end TB globally unless we end it in India. This is why it is so important to get behind the Indian government’s commitment to ending the epidemic”, concluded Castro.

The Union World Conference is the world’s largest gathering of clinicians, policy makers, public health managers, researchers and advocates working to end the suffering caused by lung disease, with a focus specifically on the challenges faced by low- and middle-income countries. Some 3,500 delegates from over 80 countries are expected to attend.

News announced yesterday that work on a vaccine trial is yielding encouraging progress is expected to be followed up at the conference this week with a dramatic reduction in the price of a key prevention drug and the announcement of a major clinical trial aimed at preventing multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB).

“We cannot end the TB emergency unless we dramatically scale up prevention in those parts of the world where we are treating it;” said Dr Jamhoih Tonsing, Director of The Union’s South East Asia Office in New Delhi. “If we are to make inroads into the epidemic here in India and beyond we need to see a radical scale up of preventative therapy that can help to stop the TB transmission cycle.”

The Honourable Vice-President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, will officially inaugurate the conference at the Opening Ceremony today.
Speakers at the opening ceremony will also include film and television actress Claire Forlani, Dr Ren Minghui, Assistant Director-General at the World Health Organization (WHO), senior representatives of the State of Telangana, and Nandita Venkatesan, a TB survivor, activist and journalist from Mumbai.

Yesterday, Tuesday 29 October, the conference hosted the inaugural Survivors Summit, which was attended by dozens of survivors of TB and other lung diseases from around the world.

The scale of the TB global health emergency has been acknowledged by the United Nations (UN), which held the inaugural High-Level Meeting on TB in New York last September, culminating in a Political Declaration signed by world leaders committed to ending TB by 2030.

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About the 50th Union World Conference on Lung Health

The Union World Conference on Lung Health, convened by the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union), is the world’s largest gathering of clinicians and public health workers, health programme managers, policymakers, researchers and advocates working to end the suffering caused by lung disease, with a focus specifically on the challenges faced by low-and lower-middle income populations. Of the 10 million people who die each year from lung diseases, some 80 percent live in these resource-limited settings.

Organising international conferences on TB and related subjects has been a core activity of The Union since its founding in 1920.

Twitter: @UnionConference

About the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union)

The Union was founded in 1920 and is the world’s first global health organisation. We are a global leader in ending TB, we fight the tobacco industry, and we solve key problems in treating major diseases. We use science to design the best treatments and policies for the most pressing public health challenges affecting people living in poverty around the world. The Unions members, staff and consultants operate
in more than 140 countries and embody our core values of accountability, independence, quality and solidarity.

Twitter: @TheUnion_TBLH

About the Union South-East Asia (USEA)

USEA provides public health expertise to the region’s governments, civil society, corporations and international agencies on tuberculosis (TB) control and tobacco control; it also conducts operational research, capacity-building programmes and grant-monitoring services.