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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD TB DAY

24 March 2008

World TB Day is an occasion to urge action to stop tuberculosis, a disease which still kills an appalling 4,000 people every day. The man-made multi-drug resistant strain and its even more lethal form, extensively drug-resistant TB, are both spreading.

If we are to prevent a virtually untreatable tuberculosis epidemic, we must tackle the roots of the problem: poor services, poor supplies, poor prescribing and poor use of drugs.

That is why the theme of this year's Day is "I am Stopping TB". This is a fight that can be won only with the collective commitment of millions of individuals – donors and researchers, doctors and health care workers, patients and family members.

Thanks to a broad coalition of partners working to stop TB, the proportion of people who become ill with the disease is slowly falling. But this progress is not keeping pace with population growth, so more and more people are becoming infected with tuberculosis.

The World Health Organization recently issued a report painting a grim picture of the spread of drug-resistant TB in a number of countries. And tuberculosis is all the more deadly when it intersects with the HIV epidemic.

We must intensify the global response in order to save lives. The United Nations will convene a Global Leaders' HIV/TB Forum this June in an effort to boost our collective capacity to drive down HIV-associated TB deaths. In this effort, we can draw inspiration from a number of African countries which have shown that it is possible to scale-up services that reach out and screen TB patients for HIV, screen HIV-infected people for TB, and initiate care. Rwanda, for example, provides HIV screening for more than three quarters of all people in TB care settings. Kenya and Malawi have also made major strides.

These impressive advances are the result of the efforts of individuals. "I am stopping TB" is not just the theme for this Day, but a pledge we must uphold as we battle the epidemic throughout the year and into the future.