

Drug firms sign up to new tropical disease fight

January 30 2012

Key players in the pharmaceutical industry pledged on Monday to donate 14 billion drug treatments as part of a new, global push to eradicate tropical diseases.

Thirteen companies including [Novartis](#) and [GlaxoSmithKline](#) have committed to the programme being led by the United States, Britain and [United Arab Emirates](#) governments, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Bank.

The drugs will target sufferers of so-called [Neglected Tropical Diseases](#) (NTDs) such as leprosy and sleeping sickness which together affect 1.4 billion people, most of them among the world's poorest.

The initiative, which aims to eliminate or get under control 10 NTDs by 2020, will also see an estimated \$785 million (598 million euros) spent on research and development that could lead to new treatments, the Gates Foundation said.

"With the boost to this momentum being made today, I am confident almost all of these diseases can be eliminated or controlled by the end of this decade," said World Health Organisation chief Margaret Chan in a statement.

The WTO had previously called for a boost in resources to fight tropical diseases.

GlaxoSmithKline chief executive Sir Andrew Witty said the battle needed a joint approach.

"No one company or organisation can do it alone," he said in a statement on behalf of the pharmaceutical companies involved.

"Today we pledge to work hand-in-hand to revolutionize the way we fight these diseases now and in the future."

As part of the push, Novartis said it would extend its donation of drugs to treat leprosy, expected to reach 850,000 patients.

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Citation: Drug firms sign up to new tropical disease fight (2012, January 30) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-01-drug-firms-tropical-disease.html>

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