

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ENDING THE EMERGENCY: THE 50TH UNION WORLD CONFERENCE ON LUNG HEALTH COMES TO INDIA, THE COUNTRY WITH THE WORLD'S HIGHEST TUBERCULOSIS BURDEN

Wednesday, 21 November 2018, (New Delhi, India) – The International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) today announced that it would convene the 50th Union World Conference on Lung Health (Union World Conference) in Hyderabad, India, 30 October- 2 November 2019, at a critical juncture in the global fight against tuberculosis (TB), tobacco use and air pollution.

Last year 10 million people fell ill with TB and 1.6 million died from the disease. TB, a preventable and curable disease, now kills more people than HIV/AIDS and is the world's largest infectious disease killer. India has the highest TB burden in the world with one in four people ill with TB globally residing in the country.

The scale of the TB global health emergency was acknowledged by the United Nations (UN), which held the inaugural High-Level Meeting on TB in New York in September, culminating in a Political Declaration signed by world leaders committed to ending TB by 2030. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has committed to eliminating TB in India by 2025.

The conference theme *Ending the Emergency: Science, Leadership, Action* focuses on what is needed to ensure commitments becomes action, and that life saving targets are met.

“It's time to end the global TB emergency and that will mean holding governments accountable to the Political Declaration they signed at the UN meeting,” said José Luis Castro, Executive Director of The Union. “In Hyderabad we need to be seeing signs that we are seeing real leadership that is translating into both investment in diagnostic tools, new drugs and a vaccine and action on the ground.”

The 50th Union World Conference is expected to attract some 6000 researchers, policy makers, health practitioners, political leaders, UN spokespeople, and community representatives. The latest research into prevention, cure and vaccines will be presented at the conference.

“People still die needlessly from TB despite it being preventable, treatable and curable”, said Deepti Chavan, a TB survivor from Mumbai who attended today's launch with some 15 child and adult TB survivors. “It is so important that TB survivors get to tell their stories and the impact the disease has had on their lives, so it is exciting that we will be heard on such a big stage in Hyderabad next year.”

The Union has a strong presence in India with its South-East Asia Office based in Delhi employing some 136 staff working on projects on tuberculosis and tobacco control. The Call to Action for a TB-Free India, implemented by The Union with support from USAID's Challenge TB project, brought together a wide range of stakeholders committing to end TB in India. Amongst others this included noted celebrity Mr Amitabh Bachchan, industrialist Mr Ratan Tata, former

US Ambassador to India Mr Richard Verma, parliamentarians, academics, and corporate leaders.

The Union's Project Axshya, launched in April 2010, engages all sectors to strengthen TB care and control in 128 districts across 14 states. Financed by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and partnering with local organisations across India, since October 2015, Axshya has to date reached over 48 million people, identified and tested 643,000 people and placed 70,000 TB patients on treatment and prevented countless cases of infection.

"Project Axshya has been a lifesaver for so many people and shows what is possible in such a hugely challenging environment and it highlights just why it is so enormously significant that the Union World Conference is coming to India," said Dr Jamhoih Tonsing, Regional Director, The Union South-East Asia Office.

The conference theme resonates strongly with TB, but it also raises awareness that all threats to lung health – TB, air pollution, tobacco and many more – are emergencies that our science, leadership and action need to meet head on.

The Union's South-East Asia office is also one of India's leading organisations working in tobacco control in India, which will be a key focus at the Union World Conference. Each year nearly one million people die in India of tobacco related diseases. Dr Vedant Kabra, Head of the Department of Surgical Oncology at the Manipal Hospitals Group spoke at the launch about the concerns around tobacco use, including its relationship with tuberculosis.

Air pollution was recently described as the "new tobacco" by World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and will be high on the agenda at next year's conference. An estimated seven million people across the globe die each year from exposure to ambient and household air pollution according to the WHO and India alone accounts for 1.6 million deaths annually. On an average, Indian citizens are exposed to particulate matter (PM) 2.5 concentrations between 15 and 32 times the air quality guidelines set forth by the WHO.

Speaking at the launch today, Dr Raj Kumar, Director, of the Vallabhbhai Patel Chest Institute in Delhi, described the health impacts that polluted air was having on India's population. He further emphasised that implementing stricter emissions standards in India could save hundreds of thousands of lives each year.

He said: "There have been many steps initiated by Government of India like the launch of the National Clean Air Programme with aggressive plans to reduce emissions to control air pollution on a local and national scale but a lot more needs to be done"

Closing the launch event today, Prabodh Bhambal, Deputy Executive Director of The Union, said: "We stand at a crossroads for lung health, and I can think of no better or more important place than India to be the backdrop to the urgent conversations that are needed to save millions of lives. This conference is the platform where we bring science, communications and advocacy together – only by uniting will we make sure we push forward on the right road."

The 50th Union World Conference on Lung Health, *Ending the Emergency: Science, Leadership, Action*, takes place at the Hyderabad International Convention Centre, Hyderabad, India, 30 October- 2 November 2019.

ENDS

Further Information:

Michael Kessler
Union World Conference Media Relations (In Delhi)
Mob: +91 730 385 9089
Email.-michael.kessler@intono-media.com

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 Diseases \(The Union\)](#), 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 150 countries and embody our core values of accountability, independence, quality and solidarity.

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.