



PRESS RELEASE

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Revealing the hidden pandemic

While much attention of the World Health Assembly was given to Influenza A/H1N1, a worried microbiologist from Makerere University Uganda, presented the most shocking data on the consequences of the ongoing pandemic of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR). Almost half (28 of 62) of patients could not be treated with available antibiotics due to resistance against these medicines – 86% of these patients were newborns.

“A significant number of these babies died” says Dr Florence Najjuka. “10 years ago these lives could have been saved, but today the remaining treatment options are way too costly for most parents.”

Dr Florence gave her presentation at the launch of the EPN/ReAct *Fight AMR* campaign at the World Health Assembly in Geneva on 20th May 2009. The launch brought together Country Delegates, WHO staff and Civil society and addressed the critical need of leadership and action to contain AMR. The participants realized that immediate action has to be taken on all levels, where governments have the ultimate responsibility.

“Dr Florence’s data are deeply worrying and they only show the tip of the iceberg”, says Professor Otto Cars, director of ReAct – Action on Antibiotic Resistance. “Complacency is no longer acceptable.”

The WHA launch was accompanied by events in a number of places around the world, for instance in India, Moldova, Togo, Tanzania and Malawi. These activities were carried out by member organizations of the Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network (EPN) and targeted governments, health workers, kindergarten and school children as well as the general public.

In his concluding remarks, EPN-board chair Albert Petersen encouraged other civil society organizations to join EPN and ReAct in the Fight against AMR. To facilitate this, a web-based resource centre should be created. He also urged WHO to report back on the resolution that was passed four years ago (WHA 58.27) at the next World Health Assembly. We must act now to save medicines for our children !

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