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## GLOBAL HEALTH PARTNERS MOBILIZE TO COUNTER YELLOW FEVER

### \$58 million GAVI contribution to prevent highly contagious disease in 12 West African nations

**Geneva** — The effort to contain deadly yellow fever disease received a boost today with the launch of a "Yellow Fever Initiative" backed by a \$58 million contribution from the GAVI Alliance. Launched during the World Health Assembly currently meeting in Geneva, the new initiative will support special immunization campaigns in a dozen West African countries at high risk of yellow fever epidemics.

Between the 1940s and 1960s, widespread mass vaccination campaigns in some African countries had resulted in the almost-complete disappearance of Yellow Fever. However, as immunization campaigns waned, a generation of people grew up with no immunity to the disease, and by the 1990s the number of annual cases had risen to an estimated 200 000 per year, with 30 000 deaths, and urban outbreaks were starting to occur.

Yellow Fever had returned as a major scourge and, as urbanization progresses across Africa, the threat of a major epidemic looms ever larger. WHO estimates, for example, that this highly transmissible disease could infect around one-third of an urban population, or up to 4.5 million people, in Lagos, Nigeria alone.

Now, thanks to the \$58m GAVI Alliance grant, immunization against Yellow Fever will be kick-started. Over the next four years, the world's 12 highest-burden countries, all of which are in West Africa, will be able to implement special vaccination campaigns to immunize more than 48 million people.

"The Initiative is a groundbreaker from many perspectives. Existing routine immunization programmes target children. If we were to do only routine child immunization for Yellow Fever, we would need decades to reduce the risk of epidemics and the international spread of the disease," said Dr David Heymann, WHO Assistant Director-General for Communicable Diseases.

"Now, however, thanks to the generous grant from GAVI, the 'Yellow Fever Initiative' will be able to vaccinate at-risk populations and thus quickly reduce the risk of devastating outbreaks that could otherwise threaten the region and the world. With this initiative, we will be working in the short- and long-term to strengthen primary health care systems in the world's most vulnerable region - Africa," added Dr Mike Ryan, Director of the WHO Department of Epidemic and Pandemic Alert and Response (EPR) in Geneva.

"Yellow fever is a particularly dangerous disease which kills up to 50 percent of those with severe illness. Every age group is at risk, and vaccination is our crucial weapon to prevent cases and epidemics. With the GAVI Alliance contribution, affected countries have an exceptional opportunity, and responsibility, to protect their populations," said Michel Zaffran, Deputy Executive Secretary at the GAVI Alliance, in announcing the GAVI contribution. "GAVI is committed to working with all our partners, both globally and in the field, to ensure the success of the Yellow Fever Initiative in Africa."