

# Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter And Pfizer Celebrate 15-Year Effort To Help End Blinding Trachoma As A Public Health Concern

Tuesday, November 05, 2013 - 07:32am

Campaign to Halt Disease by 2020 Will Benefit Hundreds of Millions

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter joined Pfizer (NYSE:PFE) today to commemorate the 15th Anniversary of the International Trachoma Initiative (ITI), an independent, not-for-profit program dedicated to the elimination of blinding trachoma as a public health concern. Trachoma is an infectious eye disease that is a leading cause of blindness and suffering in the poorest regions of the world. Pfizer has provided hundreds of millions of doses of the antibiotic Zithromax® (azithromycin) to help the global campaign wipe out blinding trachoma by the year 2020.

“The Pfizer donation of Zithromax was momentous in trachoma control, and The Carter Center was pleased to go to scale in trachoma endemic countries to get the medicine into the villages and demonstrate the world could end blinding trachoma,” President Carter said during a celebration with partners, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and Pfizer employees at the company’s headquarters in Manhattan.

“The progress and success of the trachoma campaign is something every Pfizer colleague can be proud of. Through the 15-year partnership, millions of people worldwide will be spared the injustice, indignity and pain of their eyelashes scratching and scarring their eyes,” added President Carter, founder of The Carter Center, a pioneer in disease eradication and elimination activities.

Pfizer, through the ITI, has donated more than 340 million doses of the antibiotic to date to prevent and treat trachoma in support of the World Health Organization (WHO)-led Global Alliance for the Elimination of Trachoma by the year 2020.

“We are honored to have President Carter join Pfizer to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the ITI program and gratified about the progress that has been made toward eliminating blinding trachoma as a public health concern,” said Ian Read, Pfizer Chairman and Chief Executive Officer. “Pfizer joins President Carter and others in envisioning a world where blinding trachoma has been eliminated. I speak for the entire Pfizer community in reiterating our desire, along with partners like The Carter Center and ITI, to helping end the suffering by 2020.

”ITI has managed the distribution of the antibiotic to 28 countries in Africa and Asia since 1998, said Dr. Mark Rosenberg, interim director of ITI. “Trachoma brings extraordinary human suffering and economic devastation to tens of millions of people, mostly women and children in poorer countries,” Dr. Rosenberg said. “It can be prevented, treated and eliminated.”

In the early 1900s, trachoma could be found in New York City, where Pfizer is located, and in President Carter’s hometown of Plains, Ga. The leading cause of infectious blindness, trachoma was eliminated from the United States in the 1970s. Today, trachoma remains in the world’s most isolated and neglected communities. Approximately 320 million people worldwide are at risk for contracting trachoma, with about 7 million suffering from the advanced, blinding stage of the disease.

After years of untreated trachoma infections, the eyelids turn inward, and the lashes scrape the cornea with every excruciating blink, damaging vision. Women and children suffer most from trachoma, which blinds one person every 15 minutes.

On Nov. 10, the 100 millionth Carter Center-assisted dose of Zithromax is expected to be distributed in Amhara Region, Ethiopia, during a celebration with the Ethiopian government, Pfizer, ITI, the Lions Clubs International Foundation and Lions of Ethiopia, and other partners. The Amhara Region is thought to be the most trachoma-endemic area in the world, and together the partners are actively working to demonstrate that blinding trachoma can be eliminated from a highly endemic country.

Already, The Carter Center, together with the Ministry of Health and other partners in Ethiopia, has helped demonstrate that community-directed infrastructures for preventing trachoma can mobilize millions of people to accept treatment and adopt behavior changes to improve their own lives, even in remote areas where there is limited access to basic medical care, water and sanitation.

The international trachoma campaign uses the SAFE strategy, approved by the WHO, to prevent and treat trachoma. SAFE stands for: Surgery to prevent blindness; Antibiotics to treat active infections; Facial cleanliness; and Environmental improvements, such as latrines to reduce the breeding grounds of flies that help spread the disease.

Using these interventions, Ghana, Morocco, Oman, Vietnam, Iran and The Gambia have all achieved great success against this debilitating infection. Mali, Niger, and Sudan also are on track to make significant inroads in their fight against blinding trachoma by 2015.

Editor’s Notes · VIDEO & PHOTOS: High resolution photos and broadcast-quality video related to the ITI are available [here](#).

About the International Trachoma Initiative

[www.trachoma.org](http://www.trachoma.org)

The International Trachoma Initiative (ITI) was founded in 1998 in response to the World Health Organization’s (WHO) call to eliminate blinding trachoma by 2020 (GET2020). ITI’s founding partners, Pfizer and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, saw the need for an international nongovernmental organization dedicated solely to the elimination of blinding trachoma. To achieve that goal, ITI collaborates with governmental and nongovernmental agencies at the local, national and international levels to implement the WHO-recommended SAFE strategy for trachoma control (Surgery; Antibiotics—using donated Zithromax; Facial cleanliness; and

Environmental improvement). ITI is based at The Task Force for Global Health in Decatur, Ga. ITI manages the donation of antibiotics by Pfizer.

About The Carter Center

[www.CarterCenter.org](http://www.CarterCenter.org)

The Carter Center has been a leader in trachoma since 1998, assisting ministries of health in Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Sudan, and South Sudan. Through efforts to fight trachoma, Guinea worm disease, river blindness, lymphatic filariasis, schistosomiasis, and malaria, Carter Center health programs have pioneered the eradication, elimination, and control of so-called “neglected tropical diseases” for more than a quarter-century. Emphasizing building trust at the grassroots, The Carter Center has helped advance peace and health in more than 70 countries since it was founded by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn in 1982.

Pfizer Inc.: Working together for a healthier world™,/p>

At Pfizer, we apply science and our global resources to bring therapies to people that extend and significantly improve their lives. We strive to set the standard for quality, safety and value in the discovery, development and manufacture of health care products. Our global portfolio includes medicines and vaccines as well as many of the world's best-known consumer health care products. Every day, Pfizer colleagues work across developed and emerging markets to advance wellness, prevention, treatments and cures that challenge the most feared diseases of our time. Consistent with our responsibility as one of the world's premier innovative biopharmaceutical companies, we collaborate with health care providers, governments and local communities to support and expand access to reliable, affordable health care around the world. For more than 150 years, Pfizer has worked to make a difference for all who rely on us. To learn more, please visit us at [www.pfizer.com](http://www.pfizer.com). # # # # #

Media Contacts: Pfizer: Andrew Topen 212-733-1338 Andrew.Topen@pfizer.com Carter Center: Emily Staub 678-595-0341 Emily.Staub@emory.edu Paige Rohe 770-722-4865 PROhe@emory.edu ITI: Elizabeth Kurylo 404-275-7148 ekurylo@taskforce.org