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PRESS RELEASE

KIGALI HOST THE LAUNCH OF A PROGRAM TO ACCELERATE NATIONAL LABORATORY SERVICE CAPACITY BUILDING TOWARDS ACCREDITATION IN THE AFRICAN REGION

Kigali, July 27, 2009 - A total of 120 experts and policy makers from 12 countries, including representatives from Botswana, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia convened in Kigali, Rwanda, from 27 to 29 July to gear up toward laboratory capacity building to achieve accreditation. This is a follow-up to the September 2008 Dakar meeting where WHO-AFRO announced the Laboratory Accreditation Scheme to strengthen the tiered laboratory systems of its Member States in a stepwise fashion.

Under the theme "Strengthening Laboratory Management, achieving immediate laboratory improvement, accelerating the process toward accreditation by WHO-AFRO," the Kigali meeting has three goals: 1) to show a blueprint of the path toward accreditation; 2) to obtain key stakeholders' support for accreditation; 3) to showcase a task-based training program in support of laboratory improvement required for accreditation.

The meeting is organized by WHO Regional Office for Africa (WHO-AFRO) and the US President Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), in partnership with American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) and Clinton Foundation.

The three-day meeting was opened by the Ministry of Health of Rwanda; the US Ambassador; the WHO Representative for Rwanda; the Director of Global AIDS Program, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Former US President Bill Clinton also address the audience via a taped speech. The World Health Organization (WHO) Representative for Rwanda welcomed the participants and emphasized that the theme of the meeting is in line with the Resolution AFR/RC58/R2 on Public Health Laboratory Strengthening adopted by Member States during the 58th session of the Regional Committee in September in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Because there is global consensus that laboratory services are vital to achieve universal access to care and treatment and meet the millennium development goals for health, WHO AFRO, in close collaboration with his partners, is putting a lot of efforts in laboratory capacity building to combat HIV, TB, Malaria, Flu and other emerging and re-emerging diseases such as multi-and- extensive resistance TB

The number of laboratories accredited is a key indicator to measure progress made in strengthening laboratory systems in developing countries. Participants acknowledged that although accreditation may require a lot of commitment and resources, the benefits are measurable, not only to laboratories, but to the entire health system of a country. Accreditation serves to focus the health system on the expressed needs of the customer/patient. As processes are redesigned to deliver the value desired by the customer/patient, there is an opportunity to cut waste and delete non-value-added steps, thereby allowing for reduced costs. Workforce retention is boosted by the sense of professional pride in working in an accredited laboratory. The external evaluation that is the hallmark of accreditation assures the customers that service meets acceptable quality and safety standards. Through continuous improvement of laboratory service quality, the accreditation process can enhance the quality of patient care.

In this meeting, experts will review the roadmap to accreditation, shared success stories and potential roadblocks, discussed critical success factors, and showcased the training tools that will help countries jump start their effort. Accreditation is not an end point, but rather a series of markers along the road to quality laboratory services – services which support the care and treatment of patients.

At the end of the meeting, participants will agree on the leadership and commitment necessary for the transformative accreditation process with strategic plans, policies, actionable operational plans, personnel placement and development, training, financial resources, and persistent accountable support.