



April 2, 2012

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chair
State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Ranking Member
State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
290 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy and Ranking Member Graham:

I am writing on behalf of the Drugs for Neglected Diseases *initiative* (DNDi)—a non-profit, patients' needs-driven research and development (R&D) organization that develops new drugs for people suffering from neglected diseases with the highest death rates, such as sleeping sickness, leishmaniasis, Chagas disease, and certain parasitic worm diseases—to ask you to increase funding for neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) at USAID to \$100 million, which was the President's request for FY 2012. The President's FY 2013 budget proposed a 25 percent cut from the current NTD program's funding level of \$89 million—a short-sighted cut that prohibits a necessary and timely investment in research and development for new tools to treat NTDs.

We understand the fiscal challenges currently facing Congress and are aware of the difficult decisions you and your committee face. However, investments in R&D simply cannot wait for the economy to fully recover—we must make these small investments now to ensure that we do not lose ground on the important advances that have been made in NTD treatment and control globally. Ultimately, all NTDs require R&D efforts in order to bring new tools to patients, improve the effectiveness of existing tools, respond to the challenge of drug resistance, and enhance prospects for achieving disease elimination.

DNDi calls on Congress to expand its approach to NTDs so that it includes new investments in R&D, in particular late-stage product development, an area of USAID expertise, to develop and test new drugs, diagnostics, and vaccines. Such an effort would bridge the gap between scientific innovation and equitable access to the fruits of scientific research, ultimately bringing new tools to the most neglected patients, responding to the challenges of drug resistance, and enhancing prospects for achieving disease control and elimination.

NTDs are a group of communicable diseases afflicting one billion of the world's poorest people worldwide, and threatening the health of millions more. Because NTDs disproportionately affect poor people in rural areas, politically unstable contexts, and slum settings in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America, treatment options for these diseases are extremely limited and funding for research for new drugs is inadequate. The current U.S. government program for NTDs focuses only on a group of five of the most common NTDs. However, other NTDs, including Chagas disease, leishmaniasis, sleeping sickness, and Buruli ulcer—those with the highest death rates—do not have adequate treatments.

The U.S. is a leader in global health R&D and NTDs should not be an exception to this commitment. USAID will be uniquely situated to expand the current NTD program to allow for late-stage product development for new tools to treat and control NTDs. This would align NTDs with other USAID programs in other disease programs, including malaria, HIV/AIDS, and TB, which currently allocate a percentage of their funding for late-stage product development. Any cuts to the already limited USAID NTD program would have dire consequences for individuals suffering and dying from neglected diseases. R&D would complement the current program and require only minimal investment but it can't be delayed without negative consequences.

We respectfully request that you fund the USAID NTD program at \$100 million and ensure that the agency is able to invest in research and development for new tools for a wider range of NTDs. DNDi appreciates the opportunity to share its expertise and we thank you for considering this request. For more information, please feel free to contact Jennifer Katz, DNDi's Policy & Development Director, at 212.300.3673 or jkatz@ndi.org, or Jodie Curtis, our Washington representative, at 202.230.5147 or jodie.curtis@dbr.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel M. Cohen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rachel M. Cohen
Regional Executive Director