

MSD and Fighting Blindness celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the MECTIZAN® Donation Programme

- Longest running donation programme of its kind aims to tackle a leading cause of preventable blindness
- MSD has donated \$5.1 billion worth of MECTIZAN® tablets to date and invested approximately \$45 million in direct financial support for the MDP.

DUBLIN, October 11, 2012 — Today on World Sight Day, 25 years after MSD started the MECTIZAN® Donation Programme (MDP), the company has joined with leading Irish charity Fighting Blindness to celebrate the important progress made in the elimination of river blindness (onchocerciasis), one of the leading causes of preventable blindness worldwide.

To date, disease transmission has been interrupted – meaning no new cases have been identified – in four of the six affected countries in Latin America and nine regions in five African countries. The MDP also celebrated a major landmark in 2011 when Columbia became the first country to apply for World Health Organisation certification for the elimination of river blindness transmission, after suspending treatment with MECTIZAN® in 2007.

For 25 years, the MECTIZAN® Donation Programme has donated MECTIZAN (ivermectin) for the treatment of river blindness. In October 1987, MSD made the decision to donate MECTIZAN for the treatment of river blindness – as much as needed, for as long as needed – to eliminate the disease as a public health problem. Thanks to the Programme, over one billion treatments have been donated to more than 117,000 communities in 28 countries in Africa, six countries in Latin America, and in Yemen.

As part of the celebrations, MSD sites across Ireland are displaying a photographic exhibition depicting the work of the MDP in Burundi. The exhibition provides a glimpse into what it means to be blind in Burundi and how the MDP is helping to make a difference in the provinces of Bubanza, Rutana and Bururi. The exhibition was shot and created by Stefano De Luigi, an award-winning photojournalist, who spent five years documenting the realities of life for blind and visually impaired people worldwide. In addition to the exhibitions, sites will be hosting guest speakers from the Irish charity, Fighting Blindness, as well as global MSD colleagues who champion the MDP around the world.

Commenting on the 25th Anniversary of the MDP, Dr Neil Boyle, Managing Director, MSD Ireland (Human Health) said "It is incredible that after 25 years the MECTIZAN Donation Programme is still going strong, making a real difference across the world as it gets closer to achieving its long-held goal of eliminating river blindness.

"Living with sight loss in Ireland presents challenges each and every day but to live with the same condition in a developing country has a devastating effect on the individual and their families. Our MECTIZAN® exhibition provides a glimpse into what it means to be blind in Burundi and how the tragedy of blindness often results in prejudice and superstition, leading to isolation. We are truly humbled by the great work of the alliance of partners to protect future generations from a disease that carries devastating implications for people, families, healthcare systems and local economies."

Avril Daly, CEO, Fighting Blindness, said: "Fighting Blindness fully supports the outstanding work MSD has been undertaking for the past 25 years and today, on World Sight Day, it is clear that we must all continue to join forces to make our collective vision of finding treatments and cures for blindness, a reality."

The World Health Organization (WHO) today commended the MECTIZAN® Donation Program on its contribution to near-elimination of river blindness from the Western Hemisphere. WHO Director General Dr. Margaret Chan said, "Twenty-five years after the donation of MECTIZAN through the MECTIZAN Donation Programme, we are now close to eliminating river blindness from the Western Hemisphere. This remarkable achievement is also considered feasible in parts of Africa where we once hoped only to control the disease. Thanks to this donation and to the commitment of endemic countries, NGOs, UN agencies, and the donor community, we can now envision a world free of this blinding and disfiguring skin disease."

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Notes to Editor:

About The MECTIZAN Donation Programme

In 1978 MSD scientist Dr. William Campbell suggested that the medicine MECTIZAN discovered within MSD's laboratories could be useful against river blindness in humans. Clinical trials were conducted and in October 1987, MSD announced it would donate MECTIZAN for the treatment of river blindness to all who need it for as long as it takes to eliminate the disease as a public health problem. In 1998, MSD expanded its commitment to include donation for the treatment of lymphatic filariasis (LF) in African countries and Yemen where LF co-exists with river blindness.

Since 1998, more than 665 million treatments for LF have been approved. The Programme has developed a unique partnership model that has forged standards of cooperation between the private sector and public organizations and was influential in the development of a number of other public-private drug-donation initiatives.

The MDP has been made possible through a unique private-public partnership which includes WHO, the World Bank, the Task Force for Global Health, the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC), and the Onchocerciasis Elimination Programme for the Americas (OEPA), as well as ministries of health, non-governmental development organizations and local communities in endemic countries.

About River Blindness:

Onchocerciasis, more commonly known as river blindness, is one of the leading causes of preventable blindness worldwide. The disease is transmitted through the bite of a black fly and can cause intense itching, eye lesions, and, over time, blindness. River blindness is prevalent in remote rural areas in Africa, Latin America, and Yemen.

For media enquiries and to request images from Stefano de Luigi's exhibition contact:

Helen Collier, Corporate Communications Manager, MSD: Helen.Collier@merck.com / 01 2998734

MSD in Ireland

MSD employs over 2,300 people at operations at sites in Dublin, Carlow, Cork, Tipperary and Wicklow. In the past five decades, the company has invested over €2.2 billion in Ireland. MSD is one of Ireland's leading exporters and contributes significantly towards making the pharmaceutical industry the country's leading export sector. MSD is a member of Guaranteed Irish and manufactures or packages many of its leading products for the world market in Ireland. For more information, visit www.msd.ie

About MSD

Today's MSD (known as Merck in the US and Canada) is a global healthcare leader working to help the world be well. MSD is a trade name of Merck & Co., Inc., with headquarters in Whitehouse Station, N.J., U.S.A. Through our prescription medicines, vaccines, biologic therapies, and consumer care and animal health products, we work with customers and operate in more than 140 countries to deliver innovative health solutions. We also demonstrate our commitment to increasing access to healthcare through far-reaching policies, Programmes and partnerships.