

# Statement by Medecins Sans Frontieres in response to WIPO announcement of Re:Search, Consortium for Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs), TB and Malaria

Date: 26 October 2011

Source: Doctors Without Borders

## WIPO NTD CONSORTIUM ACCESS PROVISIONS SET A BAD PRECEDENT BY EXCLUDING COUNTRIES AND PATIENTS

Any initiative that seeks to harness biomedical innovation to improve global health is welcome, and the principle of open access to compound libraries and regulatory data is one that we support. But WIPO is taking an unacceptable step in the wrong direction by setting the bar for access too low.

The purpose of this initiative is to spur innovation to benefit patients with neglected tropical diseases. This means access provisions need to be put in place to ensure the fruits of that innovation reaches those most in need. But instead of allowing all countries where neglected diseases are prevalent to access the products, the initiative restricts royalty-free licences to least-developed countries only, with access for other developing countries negotiable on a case by case basis.

The vast majority of patients affected by NTDs belong to poor, remote communities; those called the 'bottom billion'. People treated by MSF for visceral leishmaniasis (kala azar) in India or for Chagas disease in Bolivia and Paraguay belong to the poorest populations of these countries, not to their middle classes.

Many patients affected by NTDs are not in least-developed countries. In the Americas, for example, Chagas disease affects 21 countries, but the Consortium will only provide royalty-free licences for Haiti, where Chagas is not endemic.

WIPO is a norm-setting agency - and one mandated through the WIPO Development Agenda to facilitate access to knowledge and technology for all developing countries including LDCs. By agreeing to licensing terms that have an unacceptably limited geographic scope, WIPO is taking a step in the wrong direction and setting a bad precedent for other licensing arrangements.

With its timid approach to licensing terms, WIPO is falling behind in its access policies, when it should be leading. WIPO needs to expand the scope of this initiative to cover, as a minimum, all disease-endemic developing countries.