



# Kiwanis®

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**STATEMENT BY  
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KIWANIS INTERNATIONAL**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS,  
AND RELATED PROGRAMS  
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**MARCH 3, 2015**

Madam Chairwoman, I am Sue Petrisin, the 2014-15 President-elect of Kiwanis International, a volunteer leadership position. I live in Lansing, Michigan, and it is a pleasure to testify before the Subcommittee on behalf of more than 5,100 Kiwanis clubs and more than 432,000 Kiwanis-family members in the United States. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of *The Eliminate Project: Kiwanis eliminating maternal and neonatal tetanus* (MNT). Tetanus is a preventable disease that kills one baby every eleven minutes. We are seeking the support of this Committee to encourage USAID to provide fiscal year 2016 funding to eliminate maternal and neonatal tetanus. This funding would come from the U.S. Agency for International Development's Global Health account.

We are also seeking your support to provide \$850 million in fiscal year 2016 for the overall account for Maternal and Child Health and \$132 million for our partner, UNICEF.

Since both the Chair and Ranking Member of this Subcommittee are represented by women, I am proud to be here today as the first woman elected to be president of Kiwanis International.

We have made progress during the last year in working toward a partnership with USAID on their role in The Eliminate Project. The participation by the United States through USAID is very important to the success of eliminating MNT.

On behalf of Kiwanis International and Kiwanis International Foundation, I want to thank you for your past and continuing support of our first Global Campaign for Children, ending Iodine Deficiency Disorders. I urge you to also support our second and current campaign to eliminate maternal and neonatal tetanus from the face of the earth.

## **MATERNAL AND NEONATAL TETANUS & THE ELIMINATE PROJECT**

*The Eliminate Project: Kiwanis eliminating maternal and neonatal tetanus* is a global campaign that will save or protect more than 61 million mothers and newborns. Tetanus is a non-communicable disease caused by bacteria found everywhere in soil and animal excreta. In many developing countries, women give birth at home without the support of a healthcare worker and without a clean, sterile blade to cut the umbilical cord. This, and other factors, can lead to tetanus poisoning in the newborn baby, causing severe spasms and an excruciatingly painful death. It is a terrible disease in which human contact exacerbates the baby's pain; so a mother's touch hurts, leaving the baby to writhe in agony, unheld, for days until he or she dies. Mothers are not even able to comfort their babies due to the excruciating pain they would experience from their loving touch. It is also highly preventable.

During this project, Kiwanis International is focusing where the need is greatest on the populations least served. In fact, we are tackling the hardest leg of a difficult journey. MNT is on the brink of elimination, but needs a champion to complete the work.

Kiwanis International is committed to raising \$110 million to immunize more than 61 million women in countries where the disease is still a major health threat. Kiwanis' global volunteer network and strength in reaching communities and leaders, along with the UNICEF's field staff, technical expertise and unbeatable supply chain, will help eliminate this cruel, centuries-old disease.

We believe we have a very effective partnership with UNICEF and urge you to support UNICEF in its request for funding in the amount of \$132 million for fiscal year 2016.

## **MATERNAL AND NEONATAL TETANUS**

MNT results when tetanus spores, which are present in soil everywhere, enter the bloodstream. It is mainly caused by a lack of access to sanitary birthing conditions, unclean instruments used to cut the umbilical cord and unclean post-partum cord care.

The fatality rate for MNT can be as high as 100 percent in underserved areas. Once the disease is contracted, a new-born usually dies within seven days.

Most mothers and newborns who die of tetanus live in areas of Africa, and South and Southeast Asia, where many women are poor, have little access to health care, have limited information about safe delivery procedures and continue harmful post-partum cord care practices.

MNT is easily prevented by giving women of childbearing age a series of three vaccine doses, which costs roughly \$1.80. This cost includes the vaccinations, syringes, safe storage, transportation and more.

Women who are properly vaccinated with the tetanus vaccine will have immunity through most of their childbearing years. Babies born to mothers who have been vaccinated will be protected through the first two months of life.

When women are vaccinated for tetanus and learn about maternal health, they become empowered to take control of their well-being and that of their newborns. We believe these women matter, they deserve to give birth to healthy babies, and their babies deserve to achieve their full human potential.

## **PROGRESS**

The Eliminate Project supports UNICEF and its partners, which have already eliminated MNT in 35 countries. Twenty-four countries remain at risk, with more than 61 million women who need to be vaccinated.

Between 1999 and 2010, nearly 100 million women in some of the most remote places were protected against tetanus, saving thousands of newborns from death due to tetanus every year.

Since launching our fundraising campaign July 2011, more than \$75 million has been raised for MNT, more than 6,000 Kiwanis-family members have committed to multiple years of volunteer service, and more than 5,000 clubs have contributed to the fundraising campaign.

I can visualize a world without tetanus, because I have already seen funds deployed in the hands of UNICEF and the difference we are making together. What we are doing is working.

I was honored this past February to visit UNICEF Cambodia as they complete MNT vaccination efforts in the most remote reaches of their nation. I met a man, a village leader, who watched his mother and a sister lose babies to the cruelty of tetanus. They did not understand the disease and believed it to be caused by the spirit of a previous mother, who'd come to reclaim her children. But, he explained, that was years ago. As part of UNICEF's outreach and communications efforts, he is now one of many voices spreading the word about MNT and the need for vaccination and safe delivery practices. Instances of MNT deaths are becoming part of the nation's past.

As I spoke with the UNICEF Cambodia team, healthcare workers, village leaders and mothers, it was clear that women understand the importance of the vaccine; and with the tetanus vaccine as the entry point, they are learning about other good health practices. Tetanus is the beginning of better futures.

Like mothers everywhere, mothers in developing countries want to be sure their babies are protected—that they thrive. Like mothers everywhere, they deserve this.

In Cambodia, I talked with mothers who smile with hope and dream out loud of their children becoming doctors, teachers and leaders. I played with bright-eyed children, as boundless in their energy as they are in possibilities and future potential. As an aunt to 16 nieces and nephews, I have seen how the right nurturing transforms that potential into the reality of young men and women who are the next problem-solvers, compassionate care givers and world changers. I have held that potential in my own arms—just as I know the women in Cambodia do.

## **CONCLUSION**

The maternal neonatal tetanus elimination plans are in place. Countries are ready for implementation. All that remains is one final funding push. One push to rid the earth of this devastating disease.

Madam Chairwoman, I ask you to join us in this final push. Help us to eliminate this terrible disease and ensure that no baby suffers this excruciating seven-day death ever again.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.