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USAID Administrator Shah Commemorates World Health Day

Washington, DC – *Dr. Rajiv Shah, Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), released the following statement on the occasion of World Health Day.*

“Today, April 7, the world commemorates World Health Day. This year’s theme focuses on combating the steadily growing public health threat posed by antimicrobial drug resistance—a growing problem with implications for both national and global security. Drug resistance also threatens to reverse global health gains by making currently available first-line medicines less effective.

HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), influenza, and malaria are all examples of diseases that are becoming increasingly difficult to control due to the emergence of drug resistant strains. People infected with drug resistant and multi-drug resistant (MDR) strains are more likely to have longer and more expensive hospital stays and are at increased risk of complications. When the primary drug cannot treat an infection, the patient may have to be treated with second or third-choice drugs that are potentially less effective, more toxic, and more expensive.

In TB, drug resistance is particularly acute. Our most widespread diagnostic to detect TB is over a century old, often yields false positives and cannot ascertain if a strain of TB is drug resistant. We must improve TB detection using rapid genetic diagnostics that can identify the presence of tuberculosis and its resistance to antibiotics. These diagnostics, such as the GeneXpert genetic assay, are quick, easy to perform and accurate.

But even if TB is accurately detected, our current treatment regimens require direct observation and long courses of treatment—up to two years for MDR-TB. This makes patient compliance challenging, leading to incomplete treatment and further problems with resistance. That is why USAID is strengthening its capacity to assist the development of new, shorter courses of treatment.

Infectious diseases know no borders; fighting global disease directly protects the United States. And improving the health of people in the developing world drives economic growth, fights poverty, and strengthens communities, which in turn reduces the instability that can fuel war and conflict.

Recognizing this global security imperative, USAID supported the development of the World Health Organization’s *Global Strategy for the Containment of Antimicrobial Resistance* and, subsequently, promoted systematic efforts to implement its recommendations.

On this World Health Day, we pledge to contain the emergence and spread of antimicrobial resistance through the continued development of innovative tools and approaches that improve medicine use, assure medicine quality and strengthen health systems.”

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The American people, through the U.S. Agency for International Development, have provided economic and humanitarian assistance worldwide for nearly 50 years.

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