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International Trachoma Initiative and the Task Force for Child Survival and Development Announce New Merger to Eliminate Blinding Trachoma and Fight Against Other Neglected Tropical Diseases

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NEW YORK, March 18 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The International Trachoma Initiative (ITI) and the Task Force for Child Survival and Development announced today that they will join forces to leverage resources and scale up efforts to eliminate blinding trachoma. Trachoma, a Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD) that is the world's leading cause of preventable blindness, affects 41 million people in 56 countries. While trachoma can be prevented and cured, an estimated 6.8 million people have already lost some or all of their sight to trachoma, and an additional 8.2 million people are at risk of irreversible blindness.

"ITI is excited by the enormous potential that this merger brings to eliminating blinding trachoma," said Ibrahim Jabr, ITI President. "We realized in 2006 that to increase the impact of global trachoma control efforts, ITI would need a complementary partner to help us meet the WHO goal of elimination by 2020. We are confident that the Task Force is that partner."

ITI was created in 1998 through a public-private partnership of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and Pfizer, and since then, has been the only global organization dedicated exclusively to the elimination of blinding trachoma.

"Pfizer is confident that the merger between ITI and the Task Force is a positive step forward in ridding the world of blinding trachoma. Pfizer is pleased with the progress we have made with our partners over the last ten years providing over a billion dollars of pharmaceutical and financial donations that has helped break the cycle of poverty trachoma imposes on millions of families and communities world-wide. We look forward to continuing our support and working through ITI and its Trachoma Expert Committee to provide the Zithromax that will be needed to eliminate blinding trachoma by 2020 and restore the health and well-being of families now and generations to come," said Jeffrey B. Kindler, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Pfizer Inc.

"The mission and goals of ITI are a strong complement to the Task Force mission," stated Mark Rosenberg, M.D., Executive Director of the Task Force. "We are at an important juncture for trachoma control efforts and this commitment from Pfizer to supply Zithromax will help mobilize the partners essential to the success of this mission."

ITI is a major proponent and facilitator of the SAFE strategy to prevent, treat and ultimately eliminate blinding trachoma through Surgery, Antibiotics, Facial cleanliness, and Environmental improvements. The Atlanta-based Task Force, working with CARE USA, provides a forum for sharing knowledge and expertise in these four program areas, especially in the area of integration of mass drug administration, sanitation and safe water, and houses programs that address

onchocerciasis (river blindness), lymphatic filariasis (elephantiasis), and intestinal worms three NTDs whose prevention and treatment could be linked to trachoma control.

SOURCE The International Trachoma Initiative (ITI)

http://news.yahoo.com/s/usnw/20090318/pl_usnw/international_trachoma_initiative_and_the_task_force_for_child_survival_and_development_announce_new_merger_to_eliminate_blindi

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Thursday, March 19, 2009

Eye health group to move to Decatur

International effort against disease affecting millions picks ‘crossroads for global health’ as home.

By [Christopher Quinn](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

A program that strives to end a disease that has blinded an estimated 6.2 million people and threatens tens of millions more is moving from New York to metro Atlanta.

Decatur’s Task Force for Child Survival and Development will take over the 11-year-old International Trachoma Initiative’s programs beginning April 1. Pfizer, the drug company, has promised to supply the Zithromax necessary to help end the disease by 2020.

The ITI had been looking for a new host site and chose metro Atlanta because of its strong infrastructure of organizations working in disease elimination, such as the Task Force, the Carter Center, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and CARE.

“Atlanta has become a crossroads for global health,” said Dr. Mark Rosenberg, executive director of the Task Force. The switch to metro Atlanta has brought four jobs and may bring more, Rosenberg said.

Trachoma is spread by flies in some of the world’s poorest regions. It causes inflammation of the eyelids, which results in the eyelashes turning inside the lids. As people blink, the cornea is scratched until blindness ensues. Taking Zithromax once a year prevents the disease.

“We think we can help it disappear for good faster,” Rosenberg said.

The Carter Center has provided about 30 percent of the drugs so far.

“We think the move to the task force brings a lot of optimism that the goal will be reached by 2020,” said Paul Emerson, director of the Carter Center’s Trachoma control program.

<http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/printedition/2009/03/19/trach0319.html>