

“Jointly Responsible for Life: Jointly Involved Against Malaria”
Political Engagement and Effective Actions

27 September 2003 – 27 September 2004

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Introduction

During our meeting in Rome ... This year at our meeting in February we decided, for the first time in our history, to unite our energies as a Vincentian Family in a common **“political action”** aimed at the eradication of malaria in the world.

Some branches of the Vincentian Family making this choice are the following:

- International Association of Charities (AIC)
- Congregation of the Mission (CM)
- Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul (DC)
- Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP)
- Religious of St. Vincent de Paul (RSV)
- Vincentian Marian Youth (JMV)
- Sisters of Charity of St. Jeanne Antide Thouret
- Association of the Miraculous Medal (AMM)
- Lay Vincentian Missionaries (MISEVI)

Other branches of the Vincentian Family may join this team in the campaign against malaria.

All the resources of the several branches of the Vincentian Family should merge to fight this scourge through a committee appointed to publicize this campaign.

Our common slogan will be:

“Jointly responsible for life: jointly involved against Malaria”

General description of the project:

1. Purpose of this document
2. Rough description of malaria
3. Some data about the situation
4. Some ethical motivations

5. Suggested ways of involvement
6. Information and diffusion strategies
7. Planning
8. Evaluation of results
9. Web page addresses
10. Malaria commission members

1. Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to give a direction for the publicizing of the idea to all the groups of the Vincentian Family, both leaders and general members, which agree to work on this project with **political actions** and effective actions.

2. Rough description of malaria

Malaria is a disease transferred to humans by certain mosquitoes, called anopheles. This kind of disease is responsible for the death of many people. The main symptoms are: shivering, high fever and sweating, severe headache, muscle and joint pain, vomiting and diarrhea. There are several kinds of malaria, of which the most dangerous is cerebral malaria (*plasmodium falciparum*). It is important to realize that this disease can be treated successfully and that it is possible to recover and to avoid more severe consequences.

The mosquito that passes on malaria bites humans and leaves the bacterium behind that causes the disease in the victim. The mosquito bites normally happen during the evening or at night. Mosquito reproduction is based on eggs that develop in stagnant or dirty water or in very wet places and in green grass.

3. Some data about the situation

- Malaria presently affects some 90 countries, mainly the poorest countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.
- Malaria has terrible consequences on people: 300 million severe cases per year result in the death of some two million people each year.
- Ninety percent of the deaths are in Africa, mainly among children under the age of five.
- About 4,200 people are estimated to die every day from malaria.
- One child under age five dies every 30 seconds from malaria.
- Malaria is one of the major causes responsible of death in Africa, mainly among pregnant women and children.
- Malaria has tremendous psychological effects on survivors.

- Malaria is one of the greatest obstacles to the social and economic development in Africa, causing a net loss of about five million dollars per day.

4. Some ethical motivations

- *Everyone has the right to life, freedom and security for himself* (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 3)
- *Motherhood and infancy have the right to special cares and assistance* (*Ibid*, art 25.2).
- *Mankind has to provide children with the best for themselves* (Foreword to the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1959, no. 20)
- *Dear brothers and sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul: search out more than ever, with boldness, humility and skill, the causes of poverty and encourage short and long term solutions, adaptable and effective concrete solutions. By doing so, you will work for the credibility of the Gospel and of the Church* (John Paul II, to the General Assembly of the CM, 1986).

5. Suggested ways of interventions

The goal of a “**political action**” campaign is to express the views of our Vincentian Family clearly, with a united voice, to those who have power and the economic resources needed to effect a change.

5.1. Political actions

This is a more difficult task, but in the long term, it will become the most effective. Malaria can be reduced and even eliminated. We suggest here some actions to be performed at an institutional level in order that they can visualize the problem and become engaged in some projects in line with the policy of the reduction and elimination of malaria.

The above has already been accomplished in some countries or in some parts of them such as Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean.

5.1.1. Intervention of organizations and institutions

The committee named by the Vincentian Family will write a declaration and a strong appeal to international organizations like **WHO** (World Health Organization), **UNDP**, (Program of the United Nations for the Development), **UNICEF** (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund), **UNESCO**

(United Nations Education, Scientific and Culture Organization), EC (European Community), and several involved non-governmental organizations to publicize our position.

The Vincentian Family will also ask for:

- effective intervention with material, economical and scientific support in the countries affected by malaria;
- maintenance of this support to preserve future generations from this disease.

5.1.2. Education is basic for any action

Basic education is the most effective element in fighting poverty and many diseases. Some 130 million children of school age, among a total of 625 million living in developing countries, were not attending primary schools in 1988 (data from UNICEF).

Therefore, we suggest educational projects for children and adults living in the country or in the slums.

5.1.3. Sensitizing and participation

A sensitizing campaign will be promoted on the national level toward institutions, political authorities and civil society in general to invite them to be in solidarity with that portion of the population suffering more from poverty and disease.

We will ask for their commitment to preparing health projects. This campaign will require attention to mass media like newspapers, television, magazines, interviews, conferences, etc.

5.1.4. Joint efforts with public authorities

The Vincentian Family will look in any country for contribution with other organizations working for the same purpose, such as health or educational organizations, governments, non-governmental organizations, etc.

Each country should have its own committee to plan the best strategy against malaria. Such a committee will define the method of activity and will establish relationships with similar social or political institutions. It will also prepare promotional material for mass media diffusion.

5.1.5. Twinning with the Family

The use of twinning will enable the support of projects in those countries that need our financial contribution or supply of medicines to achieve a more effective victory against malaria. For example, the Vincentian Family in Madagascar will prepare a project to be supported by some European country.

5.2. Effective Actions

Effective actions might be at the following levels:

- Prevention and protection against the bacteria causing the disease
- Patient care

Some suggestions for the prevention and the protection against the malaria bacteria.

5.2.1. Use of mosquito nets

The use of mosquito nets placed on windows will strongly reduce the risk of malaria. The use of a curtain at night is useful especially for children.

5.2.2. Preventive medicines

A specific treatment with suggested and approved medicines might protect people and prevent the disease or provide effective treatment in case the disease has already struck. Projects for receiving medicines from different branches of the Vincentian Family should be promoted.

5.2.3. Use of insecticides and repellent products

Insecticides and repellent products have shown good results, although it is very important to know how to use them exactly and in what conditions and areas they may be used, since they can be dangerous to health if improperly used.

5.2.4. Cleanliness around the house

The reproductive cycle of mosquitoes can be blocked by some actions like the following:

- all food containers should be kept properly covered;
- puddles of dirty or stagnant water near a house should be eliminated by filling, such as with clay;
- green grass around the house should be trimmed to avoid the reproduction by mosquitoes;
- rubbish should be carefully eliminated.

5.2.5. Personal hygiene

People should be educated to frequently wash their hands, mainly before eating and after the use of the toilet. In so doing, the transfer of many diseases, whose bacteria are invisible, will be blocked.

5.2.6. The use of bathrooms and toilets

The use of bathrooms and toilets inside each house should be promoted. This action could be part of a campaign of the local Vincentian Family or of a particular association.

5.2.7. Clean drinking water

Digging a community well: the local Vincentian Family could carry out such a project. This project might be supported by the Vincentian Family from another country.

5.2.8. Food protection

Families, and mothers in particular, should be trained to keep food protected against dust and insects. This could be part of a training and formation program for women or through the Vincentian Family project “**know how for life,**” already running in several countries.

5.2.9. Good housekeeping

A house, even if poor and simple, may be kept clean and in good order. The Vincentian Family might promote an educational campaign for women and families in the community on good order and housekeeping.

6. Strategies for diffusion of information

The definition of “what” and “how” to communicate will be the first step for the diffusion of this project. We suggest:

6.1. The national Vincentian Family committee is the proper place to think about the malaria problem. It should suggest effective projects capable of being accomplished in short, medium and long terms. These projects should be accomplished in one country or, better, together with another country needing help.

6.2. A motto or slogan will be necessary to ensure the communality and the topics of the project. We suggest something like:

“Jointly responsible for life: jointly involved against malaria”

6.3. Initiatives should be promoted for the communication campaign in order to sensitize the whole society about this project. For example, each bulletin of the several branches of the Vincentian Family should publish some articles about the project or malaria, and conferences and meetings should be organized on this subject.

6.4. Each branch of the Vincentian Family should distribute the same promotional themes about the campaign by using whatever kind of mass media is available, as well as the different communication means of the several associations like bulletins, newspaper, magazines, etc.

6.5. Each National or International meeting of the Vincentian Family should include in the related program some space dedicated to malaria.

6.6. Each national or international group of the Vincentian Family should collect data, reports on experiences, witnesses coming mainly from Vincentian Family members who worked in the affected countries, and experts in the related fields; and then forward all the material to the committees.

6.7. To diffuse the concept that malaria should not be regarded as an unavoidable disease, but that it can be eliminated if **political willingness** exists and if necessary actions are undertaken by governments, institutions and the same affected civilian society.

6.8. To be effective and unceasing in keeping contacts with the several organizations operating in the National or International environment on this subject. Lobbying them should be done to start effective projects and to obtain their support.

7. Planning

The campaign will begin on 27 September 2003 and will end on 27 September 2004.

- Six months after the start of the activities, the committee will make an investigation aimed at a sharing of experiences and at promoting twinning among countries.
- The finished plans will be sent to the committee at the end of the year in order to share the various experiences acquired by the branches of the Vincentian Family taking part in the project. These plans will be published on the web pages.

- The committee will evaluate the project or projects to be pursued by all the branches of the Vincentian Family.
- Any initiative undertaken should be drawn up on a standard project form.

8. Project Evaluation

8.1 We suggest the use of standard indicators to evaluate the different projects forwarded to the committee. These standard indicators should provide an idea of the project and the results obtained. For example, standard indicators might include:

- Types of **political actions** taken to prevent malaria;
- People who benefited from the project: children, pregnant women, the whole community, etc.;
- Amount of money collected to support the project. Medicines collected, health campaigns among the population, preventive material, etc.;
- Actions performed to sensitize the public and institutions.

8.2 The committee will send to every national committee a questionnaire in order to know the results of this campaign.

9. Information on the Web Pages

Information on malaria and related matters can be found on the following Web pages:

www.malaria.org
www.malariavaccine.org
www.mara.org.za
www.massiveeffort.org
www.paho.org

10. Malaria Commission Members

The International Heads of The Vincentian Family have named a Commission. Its task is:

- To launch the campaign
- To coordinate it
- To evaluate the projects

Its members are:

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*“With new love let us go and take care of the service of the poor,
and seek out the poorest and most abandoned”*
(SV XI, 393, January 1657 On the love of the poor).