

# Malaria takes a step closer to eradication in Africa

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Dear Editor,

Nearly a century after launching proactive, eradication efforts, Egypt, a North African nation of ancient and modern significance, became certified malaria-free on the 20th of October, 2024 by the World Health Organisation (WHO).<sup>[1]</sup> This makes Egypt the fifth African nation (after Mauritius, Algeria, Cabo Verde and Morocco) to achieve the historic rank and the third of such in the eastern Mediterranean region.<sup>[2]</sup> This trendsetting stride coincides with the period GAVI, The Vaccine Alliance donated and shipped in one million R21 malaria vaccines into Nigeria, a move that throttled the train of malarial eradication much closer to the end of the lit tunnel.<sup>[3]</sup>

Hailed as a testament to the commitment of Egyptians towards ridding themselves of an ancient scourge by Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, The WHO Director-General, the certified recognition is the culmination of decades of strategic interventions and policymaking - from vector control approaches to effective case management and to nationwide awareness campaigns.<sup>[1]</sup>

Malaria is a disease as ancient as the Pharaohs and the pyramids. Globally and annually, it kills over 600,000 people, the bulk of which are children under the age of five.<sup>[4]</sup> Egypt's success story sets a precedent. It serves not only as a reflection of the nation's focused commitment to public health and research but also as a light bearer for other malaria-endemic nations in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region and in sub-Saharan Africa

where over 90% of malarial cases are recorded yearly.<sup>[4]</sup>

It demonstrates that sustained political will, effective health policies, and multinational collaboration that birthed initiatives like Roll Back Malaria (RBM) can lead to eradication, even in regions with complex sociocultural, socioeconomic, and socio-environmental factors. Therefore, other nations in Africa have no choice than to make this a rubicon cross too.

While Egypt celebrates her enviable feat, the broader global fight against malaria saunters on. The introduction of the Oxford R21 vaccine into countries like Nigeria represents another vital step forward towards sounding a death knell for malaria. However, there is more to becoming malaria-free. The status must be rigorously and meticulously guarded and maintained so as not to revert to the previous situation. With continued and aggressive investment in preventive measures like vaccination, research, and local healthcare initiatives, the vision of a malaria-free Africa edges closer to reality compared to decades ago when it was almost wishful thinking.

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*The authors would like to acknowledge THE LIND LEAGUE, Nigeria for providing the invaluable resources to kick-start, culminate and leverage this research project while also enabling our capacities.*