

April 6, 2020

Malaria No More Japan Statement on Combating the Coronavirus Disease 2019

Faced with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the world is challenged with how to overcome this global infectious disease. Malaria No More Japan considers it is the mission imposed on governments and citizens on earth to come through the fight against COVID-19 and use that lesson to prepare for other pandemic of infectious diseases. At the same time, we strongly urge governments, including the Japanese government, and international organizations to strengthen infectious disease control as point of human security and national security in order to protect Japan and the world from all the infectious diseases including maintaining and accelerating existing infectious disease controls such as malaria which are already endemic. Specifically, we call on the World Health Organization (WHO) to demonstrate world leadership in pandemic prevention and risk management from a perspective of global health.

1. Strengthening national system for infectious disease risk management is required in Japan

Even in Japan which is said to be a medically advanced country, measures to cope with COVID-19 have been struggling, including measures to suppress overshoot and prevent collapse of the medical system. This is due to insufficient assumptions and measures against emerging infectious disease pandemic as a serious risk factor for economy and national security as well as for people's health. As the movement of people across borders becomes more active and the factors contributing to the spread of infectious diseases such as environmental change accompanying climate change increase, it is necessary to further strengthen national organizations in preparation for international infectious diseases. Regarding malaria, mosquito habitat has expanded due to climate change, and some countries have been expanding to areas where malaria epidemics have not been seen before. By recognizing the risks of these various infectious diseases more than ever before, it is considerable to establish a mechanism for controlling infectious diseases as a crisis management system such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and to develop medical services including core hospitals, central medical institutions and medical professionals always for that purpose by investing human and financial resources. In fact, in order to function in an emergency, it is required to establish an effective Japanese version of the infectious disease countermeasure firewall, which involves dissemination of knowledge and risk awareness of the public through infectious disease education.

2. Crucial to establish and strengthen resilient health systems and infectious disease surveillance, especially in vulnerable middle and low-income countries

Particularly in middle and low-income countries with vulnerable medical systems where it is difficult to accurately determine the number of people with infectious diseases including malaria such as those in Africa and Southeast Asia, the negative impact of COVID-19 could be extensive, the establishment of an effective health care system is an urgent issue. International organizations such as the WHO need to function as the United Nations in this area in order to realize the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) Goal 3 (good health and well-being for all). In addition, thorough infectious disease surveillance and the enhancement of its functions to detect the spread of infectious diseases rapidly in these developing countries need to be addressed forthwith. It is also necessary to consider securing distribution channels with appropriate logistics that ensure security and introducing ICT (Information and Communication Technology) for management. Developing countries as well as developed countries need to take action to strengthen their systems immediately.

3. Prioritizing treatment for COVID-19 should avoid neglecting treatment for patients with other infectious diseases

The impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on existing infectious disease control, such as malaria, must be minimized. Each infectious disease measure is a matter of life and death. For instance, malaria can be easily resurgence if it becomes difficult to take continuous measures, such as the lack of tools required for prevention and treatment, in inverse proportion to the many years' efforts to reduce the number of malaria cases and deaths. There is no trade-off between COVID-19 emergency measures and other infectious disease measures, and it is urgent to consider effective measures that meet both.

4. Now, it is the time for the world to unite to strengthen health measures as an infectious disease risk management

The pandemic situation of COVID-19 demonstrated that infectious diseases did not respect national boundaries. Many countries take emergent actions to close national and prefectural boundaries and cities to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infection. However, the social and economic losses of lockdown are unknown. There are also cases where the responsibility for infectious disease is attributed to a particular country, the infected person is treated discriminatory, and racist or hate speech-like behavior is observed. Infectious disease is a common enemy of humankind, and the countries of the world must work together to fight against the virus. It is the time for the world to collaborate to strengthen health measures as an infectious disease risk management and to ensure that pandemics do not become a new cause of conflict. It is urgently necessary to revise the policy of "my own country first," which is becoming a global trend, and to increase the morale-inspiring of multilateral cooperation.

Infectious disease control is not temporary effort. Also, COVID-19 is not the only common enemy of humankind. Humans are exposed to a constant struggle to prepare for existing infections and unknown viruses that might emerge in the future. The disruption and elimination by borders, gender, religion, politics and the economy in every area needs to be overcome now. In that sense, the role of politics is more significant than ever.

Infectious disease control is not something that can be done by one country. Now, it is the time for multilateral and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Malaria No More Japan reaffirms that comprehensive efforts including COVID-19 and existing infectious disease countermeasures such as malaria, are the goals of the SDGs, which is to realize a society where no one is left behind, and we will play a part in that.