Cancer and Tobacco Are Growing Health Concerns in Africa

Atlanta 2008/06/25 -In an unprecedented meeting between the media, cancer and tobacco control nongovernmental organizations, and the health care sector, African journalists gathered in Johannesburg, South Africa yesterday to discuss Africa's growing cancer and tobacco crisis. This first ever summit was convened in order to address ways in which journalists can communicate lifesaving messaging about cancer, and tobacco-related deaths.

Speakers at the event were from the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA), the African Organization for Research and Training in Cancer (AORTIC), the World Health Organization, the National Council Against Smoking, the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, and the American Cancer Society.

"Cancer and tobacco control are growing problems in Africa," said Dr Twalib Ngoma, president of AORTIC. "They need to be firmly on the health agendas in the African continent. If we don't do something now, we will have an epidemic in 2030 that we can prevent today." He hoped the media summit would lead to journalists joining the fight against cancer by raising awareness about cancer in general public, and among policy makers and health professionals.

In response to a question on the success factor regarding today's event, Greg Donaldson, national vice president, corporate communications, at the American Cancer Society commented, "In a part of the world where infectious disease naturally attracts an enormous amount of attention, the story of cancer remains untold. The hopeful side of the cancer story has never been more positive; however, without increased awareness of the issues we will never be able to fully address the challenges presented. We are excited by the interest that this group of Pan-African journalists has shown at today's event and look forward to ongoing input from all parties."

Donaldson went on to report, "The round table discussion on myths surrounding cancer yielded impactful results – the most compelling of which was the fact that the media themselves recognize that there is a need for more information to be provided on an ongoing basis to help resolve these disconnects."

"The issue of tobacco and cancer also revealed that there is a very low level of understanding of the link between tobacco and cancer, and that the man on the street still does not understand that tobacco use causes cancer. Considering that the World Health Organization has released statistics which show that by 2010, cancer will be the leading cause of death in the world, it is imperative that we as a group provide the necessary education to help debunk these myths," Donaldson concluded.

Lillian Dube, a well-known South African actress and guest speaker at the summit addressed the media, "When I was diagnosed with cancer, I thought it was a death sentence. I soon learned that there are many myths that surround this disease and cancer is still not talked about openly. But through all the support I received, it became clear that my life was not over and that one can survive cancer." Ms. Dube is now dedicated to educating people about cancer.

Other speakers at the summit included Professor Lynette Denny, secretary treasurer of AORTIC and professor of obstetrics and gynecology, University of Cape Town; Dr. Yussuf Saloojee, executive director of the National Council Against Smoking in South Africa; Dr. Jean- Marie Dangou, medical officer, Non-Communicable Disease Management-Cancer, WHO AFRO; and Dr. Twalib Ngoma, president of AORTIC and executive director of the Ocean Road Cancer Institute in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Representatives from the Cancer Association of South Africa did a presentation on their mission and on the Relay For Life® program, a community-based program started by the American Cancer Society that gathers survivors, caregivers, and supporters overnight to raise funds and awareness for cancer.

The American Cancer Society has trained more than 40 cancer control leaders from more than 15 countries in Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean region through the American Cancer Society University, a signature international program. The Society has participated in WHO public health and cancer planning meetings in Africa and the Middle East, and has partnered with the WHO Regional Office for Africa (WHO AFRO) to host a cancer control planning discussion that brought together 20 of the region's cancer control leaders to discuss and assess

cancer control planning readiness. In partnership with Cancer Research UK, the Society is launching the African Tobacco Control Regional Initiative (ATCRI) to promote effective tobacco control policies.

The American Cancer Society is dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by saving lives, diminishing suffering and preventing cancer through research, education, advocacy and service. Founded in 1913 and with national headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, the Society has 13 regional Divisions and local offices in 3,400 communities, involving millions of volunteers across America. For more information on the American Cancer Society, please visit Cancer.org.

For more information on AORTIC, please visit AORTIC. For more information on CANSA, please visit CANSA.

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