World Pneumonia Day
November 12, 2014

Statement from the independent Expert Review Group on Information and Accountability for Women’s and Children’s Health

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Geneva, November 12—Each minute of every day, 2 children under-5 die of pneumonia. That figure adds up to 107 deaths every hour, 2562 deaths every day, and 935,000 deaths every year. Most of these deaths are entirely preventable.

Despite these appalling numbers, the political will and financial resources needed to protect the lives of children at risk of pneumonia falls well short of what is needed.

It is time to say, clearly and firmly, that the continuing failure of the international community to eliminate the threat of pneumonia for the most vulnerable members of our society has to end. The world needs to say enough is enough—our generation has the unprecedented power to end deaths from pneumonia within a generation.

Over three-quarters of children who die from pneumonia live in Africa or Southeast Asia. One can narrow down the areas of danger even further. 15 countries account for two-thirds of cases of this lethal infection—India, Nigeria, Pakistan, DRC, Ethiopia, China, Angola, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Kenya, Bangladesh, Sudan, Uganda, Niger, and Tanzania.

The majority of deaths from pneumonia among young children are caused by just two bacteria—*Streptococcus pneumoniae* and *Haemophilus influenzae*—giving further scope for extremely targeted and effective actions to remove the threat of this infection (eg, through vaccination).
There are also well-established risk factors for pneumonia, all of which are amenable to direct intervention—promotion of exclusive breastfeeding, and interventions to address undernutrition, indoor air pollution, and overcrowding, to name just a few.

And we should not forget that pneumonia can be treated, as well as prevented. Two-thirds of deaths from pneumonia could be avoided by making available key interventions to children under-5 in the worst-affected countries. The Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Pneumonia and Diarrhoea has been in place for 18 months now. But there is little evidence of its effective implementation.

What is stopping us from saving the lives of children living with or at risk of pneumonia? The reasons are well known. Poor commitment and coordination by and between government ministries. Lack of money where it is most needed. Inadequately trained health workers. Weak monitoring programmes. And lack of essential life-saving treatments.

World Pneumonia Day provides an opportunity to look again at the size and scale of an utterly preventable, but still all too common, cause of childhood death. It provides a moment to express our shock at the unacceptable toll of disease and death which pneumonia brings to those embarking on a new life. It provides the platform to speak out and say we must work together to end the epidemic—now.

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The iERG was established in 2012 as the principal global review group to monitor progress on the recommendations from the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health. The iERG reports to the UN Secretary-General through the Director-General of WHO.