

Amitabh Bachchan opens the International Conference on Lung Health

27 October 2016 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau

Amitabh Bachchan opens the International Conference on Lung Health



A message from Mr. Amitabh Bachchan, TB survivor and Ambassador, Call to Action for TB-Free India was one of the highlights of the inauguration of the 47th Union World Conference on Lung Health that began.

Approximately 4000 delegates and participants from 130 countries attended the conference comprising a broad range of stakeholders committed to tuberculosis (TB) elimination: healthcare professionals, scientists, researchers, global advocates and community members involved in different aspects of lung health, specifically TB, and tobacco control. The theme for the conference is "Confronting Resistance: Fundamentals to Innovations".

According to the World Health Organization, India is home to 2.8 million people with TB. In his video message, Mr Bachchan reiterated his support for the Indian Government's efforts to make India TB-Free and encouraged delegates to find solutions (new diagnostics, new drugs, shorter regimens, effective vaccines) that could put an end to the disease.

Mr. Bachchan, spoke of how he was diagnosed with TB of the spine in the year 2000, at a time when he was hosting a popular Indian television show. He underwent rigorous treatment and was thankful for the exceptional support he received from his doctors and family that helped him recover and resume work. He was quick to point out that unfortunately, not all patients in India have access to the same quality of care that he received, and many with TB or multidrug resistant TB are not diagnosed early enough and/or drop out of treatment because of side effects or the long duration. He highlighted the fact that though TB disproportionately affects the poor, it is not only the poor who suffer from TB. as it is an airborne infectious disease. "Forgive my immodesty when I say this, but if it can happen to me, it can happen to you, to anyone," he said.

In the video, Mr. Bachchan stressed the importance of ending the stigma and discrimination associated with the TB. He added, "Each of us has a role to play. We need our political leaders to commit at the highest level, in each of our countries, to provide the much-needed services to the most marginalised and vulnerable populations. We need to pool our resources to find effective solutions. And yes, we need much more investment in research. We need new diagnostics that make it easy to

detect TB and new drugs that can shorten the course of treatment. And most importantly, we need an effective vaccine."

In April 2015, the Government of India, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare launched the Call to Action For A TB-Free India to unite important stakeholders in collaborative efforts to put an end to the disease. On October 27, 2016, The Union South-East Asia Office will hold a symposium at the conference on "Call to Action, tapping the energy and influence of key stakeholders towards a TB-Free India". The Symposium, which aims to foster partnerships with diverse sectors, will be chaired by Dr. Jagdish Prasad, Director General Health Services, from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, along with speakers from Janssen (J & J) , Medanta and The Union.

"The Union is the leading scientific research organization working on Lung Health and is implementing large community and stakeholder engagement projects in India." Kavita Ayyagari, Project Director, Challenge TB, said, "With the WHO's new numbers of TB patients in India (WHO Global TB Report 2016) , India needs to step up its efforts and engage with diverse stakeholders to control the spread of TB. The Call to Action is a call to the private health sector, corporates, media and the civil society to come together."

Jamie Tonsing, Regional Director, The Union South East Asia Office, said,,Globally, we need intensified actions and higher investments to end the TB epidemic. Over a quarter of all patients with TB are in India. Basic TB programmes must be effectively carried out, patients should receive treatment as soon as possible and there should be increased funding for TB research and development. Any and all resistance to the TB epidemic must be ended."