**MEDIA RELEASE**

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*For immediate release*

**Lao People’s Democratic Republic joins the Asia Pacific Malaria Elimination Network as a new Country Partner**

The Asia Pacific Malaria Elimination Network (APMEN) is pleased to announce Lao People’s Democratic Republic as the fifteenth Country Partner to join the Network.

APMEN brings together countries in the Asia Pacific that have adopted a national or sub-national goal for malaria elimination, and connects them with a broad range of regional and global malaria partners to develop best practices for eliminating malaria. By strengthening linkages in eliminating countries, APMEN addresses important regional challenges, such as *Plasmodium vivax* and the containment of anti-malarial drug resistance.

Between 2000 and 2011, Lao PDR experienced a rapid decline in malaria incidence and was on target to reach its set MDG goals by 2015 of an annual parasite incidence (API) of 2 per 1,000 population and annual malaria deaths of 0.2 per 100,000 population. Since late 2011, however, malaria outbreaks have been ongoing mostly in the southern provinces of Lao PDR with focal outbreaks in the North. While the trend appears to be reversing in 2013, the country’s rapidly changing epidemiology and recent confirmation of artemisinin resistance in one of its southern provinces requires heightened attention. Malaria remains a serious public health threat in Lao PDR with nearly half of the estimated population at risk of infection.

Lao PDR’s national malaria control and elimination activities are the responsibility of the Centre of Malariology, Parasitology and Entomology within the Ministry of Health. Program implementation is decentralized through Lao PDR’s 17 provincial anti-malaria stations. Lao PDR has a National Strategy for Malaria Control and Elimination since 2011, which provides an overarching framework for their national goal to intensify malaria control efforts, targeting remaining endemic communities and key risk groups, and progressively roll out malaria elimination in selected provinces. Based on a recent comprehensive review of the Lao PDR malaria program, a revised strategic plan is in development focusing on renewed strategies.

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Geographically, Lao PDR faces similar cross border and resistance challenges as found in bordering APMEN Country Partners China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand. At-risk populations in Lao PDR are similar to other APMEN Country Partners: minority groups, forest fringe inhabitants, temporary migrants and seasonal workers, and new forest settlers.

The addition of Lao PDR to APMEN is key to developing and implementing sustainable solutions to global challenges, such as drug-resistant malaria.

The announcement comes on the verge of APMEN’s sixth Annual Business and Technical meeting (APMEN VI), hosted by the Philippines Department of Health in Manila, 11 – 13 March, 2014. At the meeting, representatives from Lao PDR will be able to coordinate strategies and work with Network partners and the broader malaria community.

Further information regarding APMEN can be viewed at www.apmen.org.

Tag your tweets with #APMEN & #malariaelimination

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About the Asia Pacific Malaria Elimination Network
APMEN is composed of 15 Asia Pacific Country Partners in the Asia Pacific region (Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines, Republic of Korea, the Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vanuatu and Vietnam) who currently share a common goal to eliminate malaria, either at the national or sub-national level.

Through strategic regional and global linkages with our Country Partner National Malaria Programs, academic and research institutions, funding bodies and stakeholders, as well as the World Health Organization (WHO), APMEN is working to strengthen malaria elimination efforts in the region.

APMEN is managed by a Joint-Secretariat from the Global Health Group at the University of California, San Francisco, and the School of Population Health at the University of Queensland (SPH/UQ). Major funding for APMEN is provided by the Australian Government via its Australian aid program. This funding complements Australia’s overall support for malaria control and elimination in the Asia Pacific, and globally. APMEN also receives funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and many of our Country Partners and Partner Institutions contribute funds or in-kind support.

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