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Merck KGaA Helps Eliminate Schistosomiasis in Africa

- **Number of donated tablets doubled to around 50 million per year**

Darmstadt / Geneva, December 13, 2011 – Merck KGaA today announced its intention to further boost its efforts in the fight against the tropical disease schistosomiasis and to continue until the disease has been officially eliminated in Africa. The company plans to double its annual donation of tablets containing the active ingredient praziquantel from 25 million to 50 million in the medium term. The company committed itself to doing so at a meeting with the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva.

Having originally planned to end the project in 2017, Merck now intends to continue its efforts to fight schistosomiasis indefinitely. Complementary to this donation, Merck will financially support a WHO-led school-awareness program in Africa. The objective is to educate children about the consequences of schistosomiasis and ways to prevent the disease. In addition, Merck intends to improve the tablet formulation and to step up its schistosomiasis research efforts.

“Together with WHO, we want to help to successfully fight this insidious tropical disease,” said Stefan Oschmann, Merck Executive Board Member with responsibility for the Pharmaceuticals business sector. Under the Merck Praziquantel Donation Program (MPDP), around 80 million tablets containing the active ingredient praziquantel have been distributed since 2008 to treat about 19 million children in 15 African countries.

“Partnership between Merck and WHO over the years has resulted in a significant increase in the number of people treated for this preventable disease,” said Dr Hiroki Nakatani, WHO

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Assistant Director-General responsible for neglected tropical diseases among other illnesses. “As well as improving the health of school-aged children, regular treatment with praziquantel prevents the development of morbidity in later life.”

Schistosomiasis is the most common tropical disease in Africa after malaria. It is estimated that more than 200 million people are infected and that around 200,000 die from it each year. Schistosomiasis is a chronic, parasitic disease caused by blood flukes (trematode worms) of the genus *Schistosoma*. It is prevalent in tropical and sub-tropical areas, especially in poor communities with no access to safe water and adequate sanitation. The disease is spread in freshwater, where parasitic worm larvae infect people while swimming, fishing or washing laundry. They penetrate human skin, enter the blood vessels and attack the internal organs. The infection rate is particularly high among children.

Praziquantel, an active ingredient developed by Merck, is the most effective therapy currently available for schistosomiasis infections. The medicine is safe, easily administered as a single dose and is well tolerated. A Merck site in Mexico produces the tablets with the brand name Cesol[®] 600. WHO coordinates local distribution.

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