



**STATEMENT FROM THE COMMISSION OF
THE AFRICAN UNION**

**TO THE AHP/DFID SPECIAL WORKSHOP ON:
“TSETSE CONTROL – THE NEXT 100 YEARS”**

10th September 2002, Edinburgh, United Kingdom

The invitation to attend this special session of the BSP Trypanosomosis and Leishmaniasis Seminar, which seeks to address the theme: “Tsetse Control – The next 100 Years” and which proposes to debate whether tsetse eradication is achievable or desirable, was received with mixed feelings at the Commission of the African Union in Addis Ababa. On the one hand, as many of you know, the African Heads of State and Government passed a decision to embark on a Pan African Tsetse and Trypanosomosis Eradication Campaign (PATTEC) in July 2000. And so, we in Africa consider the notion of debating whether tsetse eradication is achievable or desirable, if not retrogressive, certainly anachronistic. On the other hand, the fact that there are still opinions which appear to contradict, question or otherwise conflict with the validity of Africa’s initiative to rid the continent of the scourge of trypanosomosis, indicates that there is need for, or lack of, information on the underlying features of the PATTEC initiative.

Therefore, whether this debate is purely an exercise in academic pursuit; whether it is for purposes of re-stating the obvious; or whether the debate arose out of a genuine dilemma in the minds of those who, for whatever reasons, need to decide if tsetse eradication is desirable or achievable or both or neither; the Commission of the African Union wishes to honour the invitation and to use this opportunity to bring the following facts to the attention of the participants in this debate:

Tsetse flies and trypanosomosis, the disease that they transmit, have plagued the continent of Africa for many centuries. Their negative impact on the health and productivity of man and domestic animals and their persistent

impediment to land use and socio-economic development in most of Africa has been decried for now over 100 years.

During these past 100 years, various attempts were made to solve or cope with the trypanosomosis problem. However, to this day the disease still claims tens of thousands of human lives and millions of livestock every year and threatens over 60 million people in 37 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. The tsetse fly still rules and wreaks havoc in about 10 million Km² of Africa's best pasture and agricultural land, stretching from Senegal in the north to South Africa in the south, condemning the wretched communities in its wake to death, chronic debility and perpetual abject poverty and causing massive economic losses.

This pathetic sad tale of human misery and its total unacceptability have, during these past few years, come under considerable scrutiny, with more and more people continuing to question the morality behind the persistent lack of action on a problem, which everyone believes is totally preventable. A plethora of published information in books and journals, recorded testaments of eminent scientists and other forms of available evidence show clearly that we have the technology to rid the continent of the problem of tsetse and trypanosomosis, once and for all. We have the technology to attract and catch tsetse flies. We have the technology to induce sterility and cause tsetse populations to crash; we have the technology to strike at tsetse flies from the air with split second surgical precision; many people agree that we have the technology to kill the tsetse fly many times over. Every one seems to agree that as far as enemies go, the tsetse fly is not only an easy target, but also a particularly weak and vulnerable one. And so, one wonders whether it is out of pessimism or cynicism or pragmatism or scepticism that the organisers of this debate can contemplate the prospects of tsetse control in the next 100 years.

We, in Africa and our friends and well-wishers elsewhere in the world have been asking ourselves several related questions. If we have all these technologies or have access to these technologies; if there are all these experts and knowledgeable people who are technically competent to eliminate the problem of trypanosomosis once and for all, how come some people seem to accept the idea and prospect of having the tsetse fly around for the next 100 years? If this is the 21st Century, and man has succeeded in many fields of human endeavour, from engineering and technology feats and a booming inter-planetary tourism industry to splitting the atom and

dissecting the human genome; how come our communities remain captive to the shackles of their ecological circumstances and are condemned to die from diseases of the 19th Century?

How can it be acceptable that a section of humanity can continue to suffer from a problem whose solution exists? Is it proper to be the cause of avoidable ill? Why do we continue to debate issues that are obvious, asking questions whose answers we already know, beating about the bush, when we could go through the bush? Is it possible that we have been busy searching for the right answers, but perhaps asking the wrong questions? Actually, what is the problem? What is missing? What is wrong, why can't we do something definitive and tangible to solve a problem, which every body agrees is crucially important, and which everybody agrees is dreadfully simple to solve?

One of the explanations to this engaging puzzle has been the failure to appreciate or recognise the significance of the tsetse and trypanosomosis problem as a priority among the perennial priorities included on Africa's long list of critical emergencies. The tsetse and trypanosomosis problem tends to be less appreciated because it occurs in rural areas and is found only in Africa. On a continent burdened by many other priorities, such as the AIDS pandemic, malaria, safe water, roads, and a multitude of other development problems, it is easy to lose sight of a problem that does not attract the headlines. A problem which blends with its own effects and consequences to become part of Africa's tragic ecology and vicious circle of poverty and diminished productivity. However, we all know that the tsetse and trypanosomosis problem is indeed a fundamental one, affecting not only our lives and livelihood, but the productivity of our land and livestock, as well. It is instructive to note that, at one time, in the recent history of the African continent, the threat and scourge of trypanosomosis commanded the attention and imagination of at least 5 imperial powers. Unfortunately, during the subsequent decades of post-independence Africa, leading up to the present time, the importance and significance attached to the disease as well as to the urgency and necessity to combat it, became largely overlooked, ignored or simply relegated to the charge and mercies of foreign intervention.

The second reason, which has greatly contributed to the absence of tangible action against the disease has been the lack of a systematic approach or form of a commitment dedicated to the single objective of achieving the total

elimination of the problem, on a sustainable basis. During the period since the early 1900s leading to the 1970s there were attempts, which succeeded in rendering many parts of Africa tsetse-free and trypanosomosis-free. These attempts were conducted military style with the singular purpose and objective of achieving tsetse eradication, using approaches that employed area-wide principles, which succeeded in eliminating the tsetse fly and the disease from large areas in various parts of the continent. However, the events that punctuated the political history of the African continent throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (and some continuing to this day): characterised by wars, liberation movements, coups and counter coups, and other forms of upheavals that were associated with the metamorphosis of the formation of new independent states, paid their toll not only on the gains and achievements of earlier tsetse eradication campaigns, but also caused the reduction or stoppage of actual tsetse and trypanosomosis control programmes and policies. Overtime, the earlier confident efforts and strategies, which had originally been adopted and aimed at totally *eliminating* the disease became replaced with the somewhat unclear objectives aimed at *controlling or containing* the disease, which subsequently deteriorated to merely *managing* the disease. More recently we seem to have settled for the rather curious option of *accepting to live with the disease*. This resigned and rather defeatist mentality was backed and compounded by opinions from various quarters, suggesting that eradication of the disease was neither achievable nor desirable. And obviously, debates such as the one being addressed in Edinburgh today have tended to create the false and misleading impression that living with this disease is a viable option. For a time this view was fuelled and enhanced by opinions paraded by principles and champions of, what can only be called, ecological imperialism, claiming that the tsetse fly is the principal protector of Africa's ecosystems and therefore should not be touched. These views were used to block, delay, oppose or otherwise frustrate any attempt aimed at tsetse eradication. These views were not necessarily malicious; they were probably simply fallacious. Fallacious because they were built on the supposition that if tsetse flies were to be removed from the large expanses of Africa's presently uninhabited and undeveloped land, otherwise known as Africa's *Green Desert*, massive overgrazing would automatically follow, leading to encroachment and destruction of wildlife reserves and causing land degradation. However, we know for a fact that areas that have been rendered tsetse-free show no evidence of any environmental damage or ecological disruption. On the contrary, we can actually prove that the continued presence of the disease, causing overcrowding and competition for the

limited tsetse-free land, is itself a significant environmental hazard that threatens ecological balance. Further, we know that people in tsetse-free areas tend to actually stock fewer but higher productivity breeds of livestock, not more. We also know that wild life parks are protected by legislation, not by tsetse flies. And we know for a fact that communities in tsetse-free areas are not only relieved of the costs of treating or preventing trypanosomosis, but that they also experience gains in increased land, livestock and food productivity to an extent that no other single development scheme or policy can generate. And who, in God's name, can quarrel with that, especially given Africa's poverty crisis and serious food security questions? We also know from experience that protection of even small areas located within a major fly belt by regular tsetse control interventions is uneconomical. The many areas in different parts of Africa, in which tsetse eradication had actually been achieved, but which subsequently became re-infested demonstrate the need to guard against fly re-invasion from relic populations in the treated or neighbouring areas and lends emphasis to the necessity of employing an area-wide approach, targeting the entire tsetse infestation in a given area. The successful eradication of tsetse flies from Zanzibar, which was officially declared by the Government of Tanzania in September 1997, was an important historical achievement that demonstrated the feasibility and viability of tsetse eradication as an effective intervention measure against trypanosomosis. This achievement was made all the more significant by the fact that it came at a time when nearly the whole world was getting mobilized to the resigned pessimistic view that tsetse eradication is not achievable, being urged to accept the fatalistic option of living with the disease. The successful tsetse eradication model project in Zanzibar also helped to identify the practical details and define the *modus operandi* required in the execution of similar tsetse eradication programmes elsewhere. Further, the post-tsetse eradication benefits, which have been recorded in Zanzibar, including improvements in milk production, reduced costs in livestock husbandry and veterinary care, and certainly none of the dreaded negative consequences, e.g. land degradation or encroachment on game reserves often speculated by those opposed to tsetse eradication.

Perhaps the commonest or most familiar approach that has been employed and is often advocated in the control of trypanosomosis has been the use of trypanocidal drugs. However, the few drugs currently in use are fraught with problems of efficacy, toxicity and/or drug resistance. Also the future availability of these drugs is uncertain, since their production is threatened with discontinuation, apparently for commercial reasons, as their only

market is in Africa where the purchasing power is poor and deteriorating. There are no new drugs being developed, and of course no vaccine against trypanosomosis has ever been developed. We can therefore confidently conclude that while trypanocidal drugs may continue to offer the limited relief possible in treating trypanosomosis in humans and livestock, the use of trypanocidal drugs does not constitute an effective solution or sustainable approach to the problem of trypanosomosis. We are therefore convinced and certain that the option or approach of eradicating tsetse flies is the most viable and sustainable method of fighting trypanosomosis effectively, which is presently available to us. This is a matter that need not attract any debate.

Another important factor, which has contributed to the lack of action against trypanosomosis, has hitherto been the conspicuous absence of the evidence in interest, concern, spirited drive or initiative by African governments to do something about the tsetse and trypanosomosis problem in their countries. The courage to marshal the political will necessary to tackle the tsetse and trypanosomosis problem squarely has been lacking. Until recently, most activities in tsetse and trypanosomosis control and management, and in the related research and development work, were relegated to the charge and mercies of salvation from abroad. Intervention on the tsetse and trypanosomosis problem was usually initiated, sponsored and executed largely by foreign players, usually with minimal influence from local contributions or participation. The lack of a sense of ownership by African governments, as reflected in both the absence of government budgetary support and lack of local leadership or expertise in the intervention initiatives against trypanosomosis, which were mounted, had the tendency to undermine the confidence in the capacity of affected countries to help themselves, which also compromised the fundamental principles of continuity and sustainable development. The African landscape is strewn with the vestiges of many past unfinished projects: FAO this, EU that or USAID the other, projects which were foreign inspired, sponsored and managed, but which because of lack of local ownership disintegrated as soon as the foreign inputs expired or were withdrawn.

Another aspect which has played a significant role in creating confusion and preventing the necessary focus on tangible, effective intervention activities or programmes on the tsetse and trypanosomosis problem, has been the lack of consensus among the experts, each of whom has tended to promote their techniques and particular choice of approach to the problem, perceiving it as the be-all end-all. As a result of this rather antagonistic competition, drawn

out arguments and near conflict debates often arose between the protagonists of different techniques and approaches. In the ensuing heat and near animosity of such battles, the work and focus on tsetse as well as much time and other valuable resources have been lost.

But, today it is gratifying to observe that all these obstacles and negating circumstances have been overcome. We can recognise that, perhaps for the first time in the history of the war against this disease, a situation has arisen which will permit the effective deployment of all available resources, of all the willing and able players, in a harmonised manner to achieve the intentions and objectives of international action to solve the tsetse and trypanosomosis problem, once and for all.

African countries have now decided to include the tsetse and trypanosomosis problem among the priorities on the list of Africa's **must do, must solve** obligations and they have declared their individual and collective commitment to the single objective of liberating the African continent from the effects and consequences of the scourge of trypanosomosis. During the Summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, as it was then known), which was held in Lomé, Togo in July 2000, the African Heads of State and Government decried the negative impact of tsetse-transmitted diseases on the history, lives and livelihood of people in the affected countries. They asserted that the losses, misery and devastation visited on the continent by these diseases were no longer acceptable and they urged Member States to rise collectively to the challenge of eradicating tsetse-transmitted diseases from Africa. They charged the OAU Secretary General with the task of initiating and co-ordinating a Pan African Tsetse and Trypanosomosis Eradication Campaign (PATTEC).

The decision by our Heads of State and Government was a strong expression of the recognition of the importance which African countries now attach to the problem of tsetse-transmitted diseases. It was a statement that lends emphasis to the readiness of the African leaders to own the problem, clearly demonstrating their willingness and determination to ensure that something is done about it. The fact that the Heads of State and Government insist on receiving a report from the Commission of the African Union on the progress made in the PATTEC initiative, every year, is an indication that they will be the actual drivers of the campaign, the *de facto* commanders in the war against this disease. They will be cracking the whip and ensuring that the job is done, and in their terms, done "in the shortest time possible."

This therefore puts to rest both the question of ownership and the issue of prioritising the tsetse and trypanosomosis problem and their relative importance as a prerequisite for the initiation of effective action against trypanosomosis.

It is noteworthy to observe that the decision to embark on the PATTEC initiative was made following extensive technical consultations among tsetse and trypanosomosis control specialists in Africa and elsewhere in the world, in response to the urgent need to address the severe problems posed by the effects of trypanosomosis. There is now unanimous agreement about the negative effects and severe difficulties caused by the tsetse and trypanosomosis problem. This unanimous agreement on the negative impact and effects of trypanosomosis must *ipso facto* be matched by a corresponding agreement on the need for a definitive plan to do something about the problem. Within the framework of the decision by the African leaders, the OAU Secretary General commissioned a Task Force of experts from 22 African countries to design and formulate the Concept and Plan of Action that would guide the process of implementing the objectives of the PATTEC initiative. The Heads of State and Government endorsed the plan in the OAU Summit held in Lusaka in July 2001. Subsequently the PATTEC initiative was officially launched in October 2001, in Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. In March this year the PATTEC Policy and Mobilisation Committee, a body that will guide and oversee the activities of the tsetse and trypanosomosis eradication campaign was appointed and inaugurated. The PATTEC Plan of Action is therefore now both Africa's official policy statement as well as the blueprint of the operational framework for its implementation.

Africa's plan and initiative to eliminate the scourge of tsetse-transmitted diseases has received support, not only from the affected countries, but also from the international community. Several members of the United Nations family of mandated bodies, including ECOSOC, FAO, WHO, IAEA and PAAT have each voiced promises of support in Africa's declared war against the tsetse fly. Many are already actively co-operating with the affected countries and with the Commission of the African Union on the modalities of implementing the objectives of the PATTEC initiative. The validity and viability of the decision to embark on the PATTEC initiative is therefore reflected by the consensus that has been generated not only on the need to embark on the campaign but also on the proposed plan for its execution. Thus another prerequisite in the process of establishing the circumstances

conducive for the initiation of effective intervention action against trypanosomosis, namely the development and adoption of a method of work, has now been put in place. We believe that tsetse eradication, as a means of solving the problem of trypanosomosis on a sustainable basis, and as proposed and outlined in the PATTEC Plan of Action is technically feasible and well within the capability of the affected African countries.

However, in spite of the international consensus that has been generated on the PATTEC initiative, we are aware that there are questions, which are still being asked about the viability of Africa's plan to cope with trypanosomosis. Some people have referred to the PATTEC initiative as a multi-billion dollar project doomed to fail. Some have called it a pipe dream and others have even referred to it as a big mistake. The British Secretary of State for International Development, Miss Claire Short in her statement in January to the British Parliament referred to the aims of the PATTEC initiative as laudable, but expressed doubt as to whether they are achievable. We are aware that the world may have a variety of reasons to doubt Africa's capacity to succeed, and some people may therefore have little or no confidence in our capacity to achieve the declared objectives in the PATTEC initiative. However, we believe that Africa's obligation to rid herself of the scourge of trypanosomosis will not be diminished by what the world thinks of the continent's abilities or disabilities, but only by what can be done to overcome the impediments posed by these handicaps. It is therefore neither practical nor helpful to spend so much time debating what Africa can achieve or cannot achieve, when what needs to be done and what must be done is already decided and is clearly known.

It is easy to exaggerate and to misrepresent the aims and plans of the PATTEC initiative, making it all sound too complicated, and unachievable. It is easy to conduct debates and to listen to ourselves speak. What is more difficult is to suffer the consequences of trypanosomosis. What is also difficult is to find a more viable alternative to the PATTEC initiative. What is difficult is to acquire the courage to actually do something tangible to institute the necessary remedial action. No one in Africa is looking for billions of dollars to spend on the PATTEC initiative. No one knows where the notion that Africa needs billions of dollars came from. No one knows the origins of the understanding or misunderstanding that Africa's tsetse belt will be tackled in one massive undertaking. Our plan is very simple, and I have a copy here. We believe that this plan is within the means of African countries to execute, because it is based on the principle of biting what we can chew

and chewing what we can swallow, one bite at a time. The PATTEC Plan of Action was deliberately structured that way, in order to avoid the mistakes in our past, where success in the implementation of any project was only predicated upon foreign aid and assistance and based on reactive principles of intervention without consideration of the question of sustainability. We believe that we should identify what we can do ourselves, and if any one out there is good enough to want to help, they will be welcome, not to achieve what they think we need for us, but to help us achieve what we have set ourselves to accomplish. We aim to think globally and Pan African in our overall plan, but all our actions will be in form of measured steps, one at a time, and local. We have a long-term view, perhaps not necessarily 100 years, because how long this initiative takes us will depend on the summation and duration of the short-term successes that we aim to score, one at a time, as quickly as possible. We have a war on our hands, but we aim to fight it one battle at a time.

The novelty of the PATTEC initiative is based on the strategy of the principles of the area-wide approach and founded on the leadership and direct involvement of African governments at the highest level. It is a result-oriented approach that aims to divide the work into manageable units of activity, each with a clear goal and measurable objective to be achieved, against pre-determined deadlines. Each goal having a clear beginning and a clear end, where the end intended and desired is the elimination of trypanosomosis. Our plan involves the identification of zones of tsetse infestation which are isolated from other populations of tsetse species, physically, e.g. by mountains, water bodies, etc or by limitations in factors connected with the preferences or tolerance limits of the fly, e.g. food availability, temperature, humidity, natural cover, etc or where the isolation can be achieved by artificial means. Removal of the confined tsetse populations one by one will create ever-expanding tsetse-free areas. In general, emphasis will be placed on tackling identifiable naturally isolated zones of tsetse infestation, especially those at the periphery of the tsetse belt, to exploit their proximity to tsetse-free areas, from which re-invasion would be difficult. Priority will also be given to areas of high human settlement or agricultural potential. Subsequently zones neighbouring the treated areas would be tackled to consolidate achievements and create a roll-the-carpet effect. There will be a bankable project document prepared in respect of each identified project area, describing and evaluating the inputs, methods and approaches required to render each area tsetse and trypanosomosis-free, and defining the entire work programme from start to finish, with set goals,

schedules and deadlines and verifiable milestones. The project document will also include proposals on land use and sustainable exploitation of natural resources. The project documents will be used to guide governments in their development plans and available for use in seeking donor support, where necessary.

Several technologies, including GIS applications, the Sterile Insect Technique, Trapping Techniques and the Sequential Aerial Technique, which have recently been specifically tuned and perfected for use against tsetse flies, have further increased the chances of success in the PATTEC initiative. Several countries, including Mali, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Botswana, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania have already embarked on projects aimed at eradicating tsetse flies from specific areas in those countries and others such as Sudan, Rwanda, Nigeria, Ghana and Cameroon have advanced plans to initiate similar projects. Within the context of the decision by the African Heads of State and Government on tsetse eradication, a mechanism now exists through which all affected African countries will be reminded of their obligations to implement the objectives of the PATTEC initiative. In the next few years we expect to hear a series of announcements of newly declared tsetse-free areas, to add to Zanzibar's success story. With each such subsequent announcement, at a time, we are confident that Africa's tsetse-free zone will systematically continue to expand until ultimately all Africa will be trypanosomosis-free. Whether this takes us 100 years, or less or more will greatly depend on Africa's capacity to translate the spirit of the PATTEC initiative into the objectives of dedicated action; and it will also depend on how much help Africa can get from those who are willing and able to help.

Among the nations of the world, the U.K government has in the past played a leading role in addressing the tsetse and trypanosomosis problem. The fact that this debate, whatever its conclusions or pronouncements will be, has been sponsored by the DFID indicates clearly that the UK government still attaches considerable significance to the tsetse and trypanosomosis problem. We are extremely grateful for this expression of continued interest and we welcome it as Britain's official response to Africa's call in the PATTEC initiative. If the participants of this debate wish to do justice to Britain's past and current efforts in helping Africa extricate her suffering communities from the tragic consequences of trypanosomosis; if the participants of this debate subscribe to the view that helping African countries to help themselves is the best way to help Africa, then the conclusion of this debate

will be one: unwavering, unambiguous and unanimous. That the tsetse and trypanosomosis problem is a severe problem, which continues to frustrate Africa's efforts in socio-economic development. The PATTEC initiative seeks to enlist and unite international action in commitment to the objective of creating a dedicated agenda for the elimination of trypanosomosis. This objective is both laudable and achievable and it should be accorded every support possible to ensure its implementation.

We welcome the recent responses from the mandated international organisations, FAO, WHO and IAEA, which have individually and collectively pledged support and expressed total commitment to the common objective of ridding the continent of this needless disease. We are greatly encouraged by the African countries, which have embarked on serious tsetse and trypanosomosis eradication projects, breaking the tradition of having to wait for donor support before initiating action. We welcome the current dialogue in various fora between the nations of the world, discussing the necessity for greater equity between the haves and have-nots. We salute the global goal of ethical responsibility aligned to which is the declared commitment of all nations to raise educational, health and social standards, curb the structural defects in the global economy that undermine global security. Africa's most viable contribution to her expanding population and to the rest of the world is agriculture. The development of this potential will entail the opening up of the immense expanses of land, rendered uninhabitable largely by the presence of the tsetse fly. Tsetse eradication would be an important component in efforts to boost food production, with assured dividends in increased food production, poverty alleviation and health improvement.

Members of the delegation from the African Union:

- ❑ Dr Jotham Musiime, Acting Director, AU/IBAR, Nairobi and Member of the PATTEC Policy and Mobilisation Committee
- ❑ Mr Charles Mogotsi, Minister Counsellor, Embassy of Botswana, on behalf of H.E. Moorad Ambassador of Botswana to Ethiopia and Member of the PATTEC Policy and Mobilisation Committee
- ❑ Dr Chris Schofield, Co-ordinator, ECLAT and Member of the PATTEC Policy and Mobilisation Committee
- ❑ Dr Assefa Mebrate, Member of the PATTEC Policy and Mobilisation Committee
- ❑ John P. Kabayo Co-ordinator, PATTEC and Member of the PATTEC Policy and Mobilisation Committee.