

A New Partnership to Fight HIV/AIDS in Africa

PRESS RELEASE

Bern - March 31, 2004

The Swiss Red Cross (SRC) and the Business Humanitarian Forum (BHF) today signed a Letter of Agreement to form a partnership dedicated to fighting HIV/AIDS in Africa. Specifically, the two organizations will work together on a project to expand the Mahwalala Clinic in Swaziland to accommodate and sustain an integrated HIV/AIDS program. This program may possibly be extended to other Red Cross clinics in Swaziland.

Swaziland, with one of the highest infection rates for HIV/AIDS in Africa, is urgently in need of assistance with such a program. The SRC has been working in Swaziland for many years in cooperation with the Baphalali Swaziland Red Cross Society, and decided to take this step to increase the ability of Swaziland to battle one of the most pernicious effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the infection of unborn children with the disease through their mothers.

The comprehensive Swaziland HIV/AIDS program consists of four main components: a home-based care program; a youth program (HIV prevention and orphan support); a voluntary counseling and testing program (VCT); and an anti-retroviral therapy program for the prevention of mother to child transmission (MTCT). The SRC manages the comprehensive program with the Baphalali Swaziland Red Cross Society.

The BHF will assist in obtaining support for expanding the integrated HIV/AIDS program - currently budgeted at initial capital costs of 425,000 Swiss Francs to improve the Mahwalala Clinic as well as recurrent annual program operating costs of 1,104,000 Swiss Francs over a period of five years - by bringing the resources and expertise of the private sector to bear on the project through working partnerships with private companies as well as public institutions such as foundations and governments. These partnerships will seek to provide the necessary medicines, technical support, training, and basic infrastructure support for the Mahwalala Clinic such as laboratory equipment and building expansion.

At the signing ceremony, the Director of the SRC, Daniel Biedermann, noted that the agreement is an important step for the SRC, in that it provides for the possibility of major private sector assistance to a concrete project to expand an urgently needed HIV/AIDS program.

The President of the BHF, John Maresca, indicated that the BHF would work closely with private businesses, especially in the pharmaceutical sector, to find the necessary assistance for the program. He also expressed his hopes that the program could rapidly be replicated elsewhere in Swaziland and in Africa.

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Further information - BHF: www.bhforum.org - SRC: <http://www.redcross.ch/>