Brazil hosts WHO event on the Post-2015 Eliminating TB Strategy

From the 29th of April to the 1st May, high burden countries’ representatives, multilateral agencies, civil society organizations and researchers met in San Paulo as part of the WHO Consult on Elimination of the Catastrophic Economic Burden of TB: Universal Health Coverage and Social Protection Opportunities.

During the three days countries such as Brazil, El Salvador, Kenya, Thailand, the Philippines, Pakistan and Peru shared experiences on universal health coverage and social protection strategies that can subsidize the Post-2015 Stop TB Strategy.

Those subjects represent the scenario that many of these countries are currently living – either implementing or expanding innovative mechanisms to finance health coverage and social protection schemes, focusing on highly vulnerable populations and people living in extreme poverty conditions.

The Brazilian Health Surveillance Secretary, Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, highlighted that TB is one of the diseases that mostly represents the challenges in the health sector “When we thought we were close to the elimination of TB, it came back linked with HIV and to social issues, causing an impact in health and in the society. Therefore we need to come up with strategies that prioritize TB along with special actions towards the vulnerable populations – actions regarding access to diagnosis and treatment. That is why articulating with other sectors is extremely important”.

According to the Secretary, Brazil was able to reach some of the MDGs thanks to the income transfer policies in addition to the free distribution of drugs. “That explains, for instance, the few MDR-TB cases in the country” he stated.
According to the WHO Stop TB Department Director, Dr. Mario Raviglione, the decrease on the TB incidence rate is directly connected to health services access. “It is not acceptable to charge poor patients to access services. We need social protection strategies for these people, avoiding in that sense, the economic burden on diagnoses and treatment, and expanding the cure rate.

**Parliamentary Front to Fight TB**

The Parliamentary Front to Fight TB was one of the highlights of the event, represented by the Congresswoman Janete Pietá. Countries Representatives were sensitized with the work possibilities through the insertion of the TB theme in the parliament.

The Front was established in May 2012, and it aims to follow up with the national policy on TB control, searching, in a continuous basis, to improve the legislation related to health and social assistance, through theme commissions in the two Houses of the National Congress (the Senate and the Deputies’ Chamber).

Among the works developed, the main projects are to follow up budget elaboration and execution, in order to expand investments in governmental programmes; and to search for alternative financing for NGOs’ activities, through amendments, social subsidy and legislative projects.

According to Congresswomen Janete Pietá (PT-SP), it is necessary to have a synergy between the parliament, the executive power and states and municipalities, to expand the fight against TB. “Through the Parliament it is possible to follow up with policies, promote debates and seminars, in order to create a practical vision of how to intervene in budget issues. It was after the establishment of the Front that we were able to approve an amendment to the Budget Guidelines Law, which allows more flexibility in the access
to public resources. The beneficiaries are community-based organizations aiming to develop actions and promoting health in areas such as TB”.

In March 2013, the Front has also pursued the development of a specific Sub-commission of poverty related diseases, in which TB is part of. “Starting from this sub-commission it will be possible to raise awareness in the parliament in order to subsidize health policies”, she stated.

To the activist and Executive Secretary of the Stop TB Brazil, Jair Brandão, the Parliamentary Front to Fight TB is a concrete example of the joint work among government and civil society. “Brazil is not only a world model in social issues, but also for the establishment of a strong and active movement”.

Jair also recalled that the Global Fund Project in Brazil, concluded in the same year that the Front was launched, was one of the main achievements in order to control the disease. “During the five years that followed, the project developed metropolitan committees that represented a democratic space to debate health policies, with the involvement of civil society. The project brought a positive influence on social support to TB patients. Unfortunately the project arrived to an end and some actions were discontinued for resource reasons”.