Tuberculosis is theme in international meeting at the Brazilian Congress

08 October 2015, Brasilia – “Tuberculosis is the biggest killing infectious disease in the world. We have accomplished many advances to control it worldwide, but if we continue in this pace, it will take us at least 200 years to eliminate the disease.” This is the opening line of the British Member of Parliament Nick Herbert, who was at the Brazilian Congress to call upon the importance of TB control in the world.

Herbert is the co-chair of the Global TB Caucus and participated in meetings with Members of Parliament from the Brazilian Tuberculosis Caucus and in a specific public hearing about the TB theme.

Under the leadership of Congressman Antonio Brito, president of the Brazilian TB Caucus, the hearing conducted on October 8th had the participation of Herbert, Antonio Carlos Nardi – Health Surveillance Secretary from the Ministry of Health, Luis Codina – deputy-director of the Pan-American Health Organization in Brazil and Carlos Basilia – Executive Secretary of Stop TB Brazil.

The aim of the public hearing, articulated among the National TB Caucus, the Global TB Caucus and the National Tuberculosis Programme from the Ministry of Health, was to raise the debate on the role of Parliament in the global fight against TB.

To Nick Herbert, MPs play an essential role to ensure the presence of the topic in the political debate of each country. “As new threats such as Ebola require the world’s attention, we need to remind political leaders that tuberculosis still kills 1.5 million people every year, which means that every two days it kills more than Ebola has killed in total. The world cannot afford choosing to tackle one or another disease – it is essential to fight in all fronts to beat all of those epidemics,” stated Herbert.

With the support of Congressman Brito, one of the founder signatories of the Global TB Caucus, Herbert called upon other Brazilian MPs to join the group, signing the Barcelona Declaration, a document that inaugurates the Caucus. The group has already reached a number of 596 MPs from 97 countries in less than a year since the official launch (November 2014).
On the previous day, October 7, Nick Herbert also participated in the ordinary meeting of the Social Security and Family Committee, from the Deputies’ Chamber, sharing the table with Lord Jim O’Neill, UK Commercial Secretary to the Treasury and creator of the acronym BRIC, and Dame Sally Davies, Chief Medical Officer of the UK Government. During the meeting, they discussed about TB and anti-microbial resistance to antibiotics and the need for Research and Development for the production of new drugs and diagnostics.

They were unanimous in strengthening the importance of a coordinated action among countries, and how Brazil can play a key role in the cooperation with other emerging economies. “We have to invest now on the production of more effective drugs and this should be a joint work. The risk of epidemics caused by resistant microbial populations is very high and the most affected are the developing countries,” Lord O’Neill explains.

Forty-two congressmen were present in the meeting. They had the opportunity to clarify their doubts related to the theme with the experts, and highlight the social determinant issues related to the spread of tuberculosis and other neglected diseases.

Visit to Rocinha*

In a visit to the Rocinha community, guided by Carlos Basilia – executive secretary of Stop TB Brazil, and Rita Smith – founder and president of the Rocinha Support Group to TB Patients and Former Patients (Gaexpa), Matt Oliver – Global TB Caucus representative, and UK Parliamentarian Nick Herbert had the opportunity to get to know the relation among the social determinants and TB incidence in Rocinha.

The visit was motivated by the Parliamentarian personal interest to know a community with high incidences of the disease, a public health facility, the life conditions of those affected by tuberculosis, and the actions conducted by civil society, NGOs and community groups. The Parliamentarian relinquished the prerogative of especial security due to his international authority condition and walked in the streets and alleys of the community, very thoughtfully talked to residents, TB patients and health professionals.

The Brazilian Tuberculosis Caucus

Established on May 8, 2012, the Caucus was an old claim from activists and public health managers, officialized due to an initiative from Congressman Antonio Brito, president of the Social Security and Family Committee in the Deputies’ Chamber, with the purpose of following up the national tuberculosis control policies. It aimed to improve the legislation related to health, social assistance and other associated policies throughout the theme committees from both houses at the National Congress.
“Test, treat and win” is the slogan of the new campaign stared by the football player Thiago Silva. “Tuberculosis exists, but it is curable,” alerts the footballer in the video. The defender was diagnosed with the disease in 2005, when he was hired by a Russian team. He came back to Brazil, where he received treatment from the Unified Health System. He was cured and continued his career as a football player.

The lack of information can be an obstacle to TB diagnosis and treatment. The advertisement pieces alert people about the main symptoms of the disease, and advise them to look for a health facility. In addition, to be completely cured of TB, patients must stop the minimum six month treatment. The purpose of the campaign is to provide more information to the population in order to reduce the prejudice and stigma that surround the disease.

*Information from the TB Observatory Brazil: https://www.facebook.com/ObservatorioTuberculose/posts/712052415593090:0