

# Environmental Watch

Examining the Environmental Claims and Their Costs to Washington State

## **Africa Malaria Day - action or bombast?**

by Roy Innis

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### **Claim**

We will “have the malaria mortality for Africa’s people by 2010, through implementing the strategies and actions for Roll Back Malaria...” and “initiate appropriate and sustainable action to strengthen health systems...by the year 2005.”

Leaders of 44 African nations in The Abuja Declaration to Roll Back Malaria, April 25, 2000.

“Today we have begun to write the final chapter of the history of malaria.”

Olusegun Obasanjo, President of Nigeria, April 25, 2000.

“Indoor spraying of DDT, or any other insecticide, is not cost-effective and is very difficult to maintain.”

U.S. Agency for Development, “USAID and Malaria,” [www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/global\\_health/id/malaria/news/afmalm\\_ddt.html](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/id/malaria/news/afmalm_ddt.html), accessed April 25, 2006.

### **Facts**

“More than 80% of world malaria death occur in Africa...”

World Malaria Report, 2005, at [http://www.rbm.who.int/wmr2005/html/exsummary\\_en.htm](http://www.rbm.who.int/wmr2005/html/exsummary_en.htm), accessed April 25, 2006.

**Every year, over 400 million African mothers, fathers and children are stricken by acute malaria.**

That’s as many victims as there are people in the United States and Mexico combined.

Fevers, chills, vomiting, diarrhea, delirium and unconsciousness leave them unable to work, cultivate fields, attend school or care for their families for weeks on end. Many are permanently brain damaged. **Nearly 1 million die.** No wonder sub-Saharan Africa is one of the most impoverished regions on Earth.

Every year, Africa Malaria Day (April 25) is marked by promises to bring malaria under control. But every year calls for action turn out to be mere bombast, as healthcare agencies refuse to go beyond bed nets and “capacity building,” **radical greens continue to obstruct proven strategies, and disease and death rates climb.**

This year, however, things may be different.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Greenpeace co-founder Patrick Moore, and hundreds of physicians, clergy and human rights advocates have joined me in demanding that DDT be put back into the malaria control arsenal. (See [www.FightingMalaria.org](http://www.FightingMalaria.org)) The US Congress, Republicans and Democrats alike, now support indoor DDT spraying as a vital component of any successful malaria control program, and the U.S. Agency for International Development has initiated DDT and other insecticide spraying programs in several countries.

Sprayed in small quantities, just twice a year, on the walls and eaves of mud-and-thatch or cinder-block homes, it keeps 90% of mosquitoes from entering and irritates any that do come in, so they rarely bite. No other insecticide – at any price – does that. Of course, it also kills those that land on walls.

Used this way, **virtually no DDT even reaches the environment.** But the results are astounding.

Within two years of starting DDT programs, South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia, Madagascar and Swaziland **slashed their malaria rates by 75 percent or more.** With fewer people getting sick, they could get scarce ACT (artemisinin-based combination therapies) drugs to nearly all victims, and cut rates even further. By contrast, bed nets might reduce malaria rates by a measly 20 percent.

Malaria once killed thousands of Americans annually, from New York to California, from Florida and Louisiana to Michigan and Alaska. It sent Jamestown colonists to early graves and, even in the 1930s, reduced the industrial output of the USA’s southern states by a third.

It arrived in Europe 2,600 years ago. Hippocrates described it, Cromwell died from it, Charles II and Louis



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XIV nearly perished, and Rome was saved several times from Germanic armies whose ranks were decimated by the deadly fever. From Italy and Romania to Poland and the English Channel, malarial mosquitoes ruled over Europe for centuries. Homegrown malaria was not eradicated in Germany until 1950, in the Netherlands until 1959.

**Aggressive interventions, including widespread use of DDT, finally ended its deadly grip.** Once the United States and Europe became malaria-free, however, they began to impose restrictions that have perpetuated malaria elsewhere, especially in Africa.

They banned DDT, while grudgingly leaving a rarely honored exception in the Stockholm Convention. With few exceptions, aid agencies refused to supply or support the use of insecticides, especially DDT. They still promote bed nets and education – while awaiting a vaccine that’s still a decade away, and mud-

## **Costs**

Other countries want to launch similar programs. However, the EU is again warning of possible agricultural export sanctions against Uganda, Kenya and other countries that use DDT to save lives. Previous threats were pointed and direct; the latest are more oblique.

**“Nothing will happen, at least on the official side, if they decide to use DDT in strict compliance with the Stockholm Convention”** on chemicals, the EU’s trade representative to Uganda said recently. But the EU has “no control” over environmental and consumer organizations that might pressure supermarkets to stop selling agricultural products from those nations, he claimed.

In other words, if callous activists want to emphasize overblown risks from trace amounts of insecticides – and ignore the very real, life-or-death = risks that those insecticides could prevent – the EU’s hands are tied. It can’t even do anything as simple as issuing an official statement, attesting that DDT is safe and effective and represents no threat to EU consumers. If more Africans get sick and die, that’s a shame, but we Europeans have our own concerns.

The struggle for human rights – especially the fundamental right to life itself – is obviously not over.

I have seen this devastation with my own eyes. Malaria destroyed the lives of my wife’s African friends and family members. Last Christmas, my nephew returned to a Ugandan school that he sponsors, to find that 50 of its 500 young students had died from malaria in just 12 months. My daughter-in-law lost two sisters, two nephews and her little son.

It’s time for Europe to end its deadly policies. Individual countries and the EU Parliament must issue an unequivocal declaration, supporting DDT as a vital component of any malaria control program. Affirming the right of every country’s health minister to decide which weapons to use in combating disease. Agreeing to support insecticide spraying programs. Saying trade bans and lethal supermarket campaigns will not be tolerated. And pledging to penalize any country or organization that tries to block life-saving insecticide programs.

For too long, the European Union, environmental groups and healthcare agencies let horribly misguided policies perpetuate malaria’s global reign of terror. **They have it within their power to save millions of lives, and improve health and economic conditions for billions.**