

## **World Blood Donor Day**

### **SPEECH by WHO**

**Dr Steffen Groth, Director, Essential Health Technologies**

Today the world celebrates voluntary blood donors. Thanks to them, thousands of lives are saved every day across the globe. In England last year, one million lives were saved or improved due to blood transfusions; four and a half million in the United States.

But unfortunately, many more lives are lost because of a lack of access to blood – safe blood – in developing countries. Unlike you, most people in those countries cannot take a reliable, safe supply of blood for granted. However, one thing their governments can do, is encourage healthy people to give blood.

World Blood Donor Day 2005 is a day for serious personal reflection as well as a day to thank the world's regular, voluntary blood donors. Each person can contribute to saving a life, either by becoming a regular donor or – if health reasons prevent it – by volunteering to help on blood donation days.

Today is celebrated across the globe with one city representing the centre of activities – London, a major international hub and the capital of a country which has a solid tradition of collection of safe blood supplies by relying on voluntary, unpaid donation.

### **WORLD STATISTICS**

World Blood Donor Day provides the opportunity to raise awareness of the need for safe blood and safe donors. Some 60% of global blood supplies goes to 18% of the world's people, leaving 82% of the global population inadequately covered.

Today we highlight the fact that voluntary unpaid blood donors are the foundation of a safe blood supply because they are associated with low levels of infections that can be transmitted by transfusion, including HIV and hepatitis viruses. Screening for transfusion-transmissible infections is essential, but the safest donations come from the safest donors.

A reliable supply of safe blood is essential for scaling up health at several levels, particularly for women and children. For instance, more than half a million women die every year from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth worldwide - 99% of them in developing countries. Haemorrhage, accounting for 25% of the complications, is the most common cause of maternal death.

Up to 70% of all blood transfusions in Africa are given to children with severe anaemia due to malaria, which accounts for about one in five of all childhood deaths in Africa.

World Blood Donor Day is an important part of the strategy to reduce transmission of serious illnesses like HIV/AIDS, malaria, hepatitis B and C. HIV-contaminated blood still accounts for approximately 5% of HIV infections in Africa. While in many countries more and more testing is being done to make blood safe, most developing nations do not test for diseases such as HIV or hepatitis B and C. Annually, some six million tests that should be done for infections are not done.

But all these statistics should not make us forget that today is about people. On television this morning, you may have watched the filming that we recently did in Malawi. A country with more than 14% of its people HIV-positive and huge development challenges, has managed to set up a functioning blood service based on voluntary unpaid donation in just two years. The benefits are measurable in real human terms with more children and mothers surviving.

Blood, the life source that flows in every person, can be shared to help others. Blood saves lives; safe blood begins with each one of us. This unique resource upon which all lives are dependent can be shared. It is up to each and every one of us, as global citizens, to help others.

World Blood Donor Day is supported by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Federation of Blood Donor Organizations and the

International Society of Blood Transfusion. Last month, the World Health Assembly, which includes the 192 Member States of the World Health Organization, voted in favour of WORLD BLOOD DONOR DAY becoming an official, yearly event to promote voluntary blood donation globally.

Between them, these organizations represent 192 Member States, 181 national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 50 national voluntary blood donor organizations and blood transfusion specialists throughout the world.

Thank you for listening. It is my honour now to hand over to Heather Mills McCartney who will officially open this Celebration Gallery but will also set in motion similar activities around the world.