

THE CARTER CENTER



NEWS

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Global Partners Plot Final Assault on Guinea Worm Disease

Guinea worm, beware. This was the message at the Seventh African Regional Conference on Guinea Worm Eradication held this spring in Bamako, Mali. More than 200 warriors in the battle against the dreaded disease gathered to plot their strategy for the final push toward eradication.

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter praised the group for achieving a 95 percent reduction in cases but warned against complacency. "We need to concentrate our efforts on nations that still have even one case of Guinea worm (*dracunculiasis*)," he said. "Let's focus on eradicating this disease, making it only the second after smallpox to be wiped off the Earth. Then we can move on to other diseases."

Gen. Amadou Toumani Touré, the former president of Mali, echoed President Carter's sentiments, issuing a "direct order" for everyone to win the war against the worm, which has existed for centuries.



Robert Grossman

Resident Technical Advisors Teshome Gebre (left) and Ross Cox are among those waging the final assault on Guinea worm disease in Africa. See page 3 to learn more about their work.

People become infected by drinking stagnant water contaminated with fleas carrying Guinea worm larvae. Inside the human body, the larvae grow to as long as 3 feet. After one year, the threadlike worm emerges slowly through a blister on the skin. Many victims immerse the area in water to soothe the burning pain.

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AMERICA PROJECT LOOKS AT HELPING FAMILIES LEAVE WELFARE FOR WORK

Across the country, innovative partnerships between the public and private sectors are helping families go from welfare to work in compliance with new federal and state laws.

In March, 100 leaders from business, government, nonprofit groups, and research organizations met at The Carter Center to strategize about preparing more welfare recipients for the work force. Sponsored by the Center's America Project, the conference addressed training and hiring welfare recipients and barriers to employment, including child care and transportation.

Participants also shared success stories and lessons to help guide newer experimental programs.

"We're not simply ending welfare as we know it," said Eli Segal, president and CEO of the Welfare to Work Partnership, based in Washington, D.C. "We're helping people reclaim their independence and make better lives for themselves and their families."

Mr. Segal also stressed the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors, encouraging corpora-

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U.N. High Commissioner Mary Robinson Serves as the World's Ambassador for Human Rights

In May, The Carter Center hosted a consultation of some 30 human rights experts including Mary Robinson, U.N. high commissioner for human rights. They discussed how to increase the United Nations' capacity to protect rights in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which marks its 50th anniversary this year. Ms. Robinson, the former president of Ireland, shared her thoughts about the Declaration and human rights today:

Q: Why is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights so important?

A: It represents the vision of 50 years ago, after two devastating world wars. That vision was shaped by a few people, including Eleanor Roosevelt, who recognized the importance of setting down the rights of all people at the international level. It was the first time this was done.

The Declaration addresses a broad range of rights—civil, political, economic, social, and cultural.

Q: What impact has the Declaration had during the 50 years it has been in effect?

A: It has had a huge impact. On the international level, there are two human rights Covenants,¹ the core Conventions,² and U.N. treaty bodies, which monitor implementation of the Conventions and Covenants. Also, many constitutions, including those of developing countries, refer to and incorporate the Declaration's principles. It's a wonderful standard.

¹The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

²The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Q: What would you like to see happen to strengthen human rights and the work of human rights advocates?

A: A short time ago, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in Geneva passed the Declaration of Human Rights Defenders, which will go to the U.N. General Assembly for consideration. It took 13 years of discussion, and it is very important because it recognizes the role of individuals, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others in protecting and promoting human rights.

Sadly, just as the Commission passed that Declaration, we had to observe a minute of silence for a well-known Colombian human rights lawyer who was brutally killed in his home. We also had the equally brutal death of the Roman Catholic bishop in Guatemala. So it's

“Some governments, even some foundations, have stopped paying attention to human rights. It's very important that we bring back the message that human rights are crucial to preventing conflicts, to preserving the environment, to every aspect of our lives.”

—Mary Robinson



UN/DPI Photo

not an abstraction; there is a need, at the international level, to protect human rights defenders. That's part of reinvigorating the debate on human rights.

Q: What role do NGOs such as The Carter Center play in the human rights arena?

A: NGOs have been very important in promoting the Universal Declaration. They also play a critical role leading up to, during, and following the Commission's annual session. Each U.N. World Conference was hugely influenced by NGOs. Look at our preparations for

this summer's Conference on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court in Rome: It's the network of human rights NGOs pressing for standards, principles, and values in the Court that's leading the debate. I see NGOs as partners in human rights work and as a huge resource to me and my office.

Q: How do you define your role as high commissioner, and how does the international community perceive it?

A: I have a very broad mandate. I maintain a working dialogue with all governments, regional organizations, and the NGO and academic communities for promoting and protecting human rights. The mandate makes very clear that there must be a balance among all human rights.

When I visit a country—I've been to South Africa, Rwanda, Uganda, Cambodia, Iran, and most recently, Morocco—I meet my colleagues working for the various U.N. agencies—UNICEF, the United Nations Development Program, the World Food Program. We discuss how together we are promoting human rights in that country. This is serving to re-energize the United Nations. ■

CARTER CENTER FIELD STAFF BATTLE GUINEA WORM FROM THE TRENCHES

When the female worm touches water, she releases tens of thousands of larvae, beginning the cycle again.

Although the disease cannot be cured, it can be stopped. Villagers must filter their water. They also can use the nontoxic chemical Abate to kill larvae or drill borehole wells for fresh drinking water. Today, about 150,000 cases remain compared to more than 3.2 million in 1986.

In Mali, conference participants focused on lingering obstacles to eradication such as educating nomadic groups.

“Nomadic people can contaminate water supplies of villages through which they pass and become infected themselves by drinking contaminated water while traveling,” said Donald Hopkins, M.D., associate executive director of The Carter Center. “We must identify effective methods to educate this special population about prevention.”

All 16 affected African countries except Kenya were represented at the conference, which was co-sponsored by the Government of Mali, The Carter Center, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

After days of intense brainstorming, participants emerged newly energized for their continuing battle. “Eradicating a disease is a very difficult challenge,” President Carter said. “We all work together in an army that is on the verge of winning a great victory.” ■



Donald Hopkins, M.D.



Gen. Amadou Toumani Touré

Every general knows that most battles are fought in the trenches. The war against Guinea worm disease is no exception.

The Carter Center’s Resident Technical Advisors (RTAs), who spend their days wrestling the “fiery serpent,” shared their stories and strategies at a conference in Mali.

“We’re trying innovative ways to help educate people,” said Mali RTA Brad Barker, a native of Oregon. “For example, we hold a competition akin to the American game show *Jeopardy*. Winners receive small prizes such as cola nuts or sugar for knowing the correct answers to Guinea worm prevention questions.”

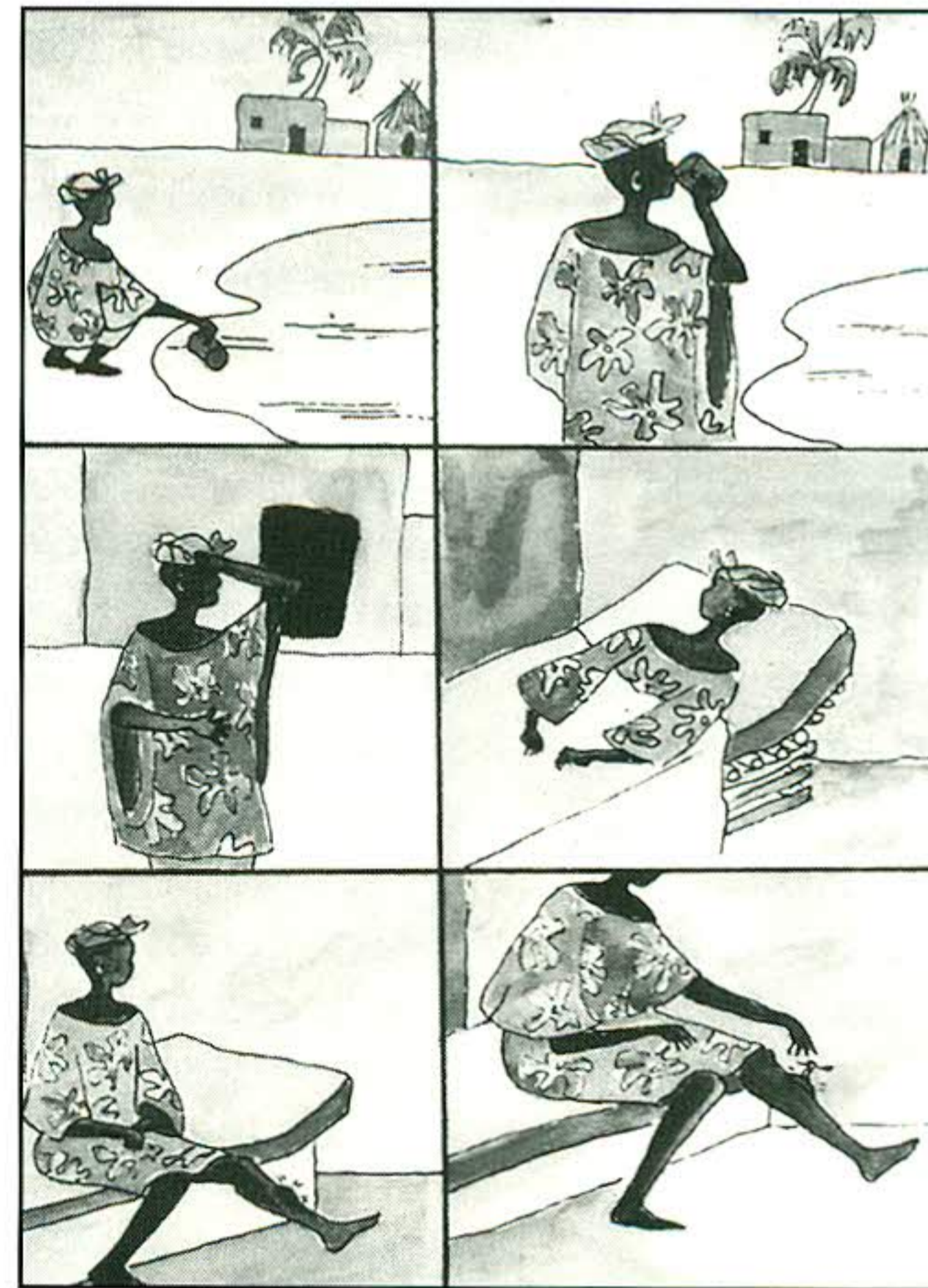
“We provide incentives for village-based volunteers and other health workers to keep them focused on eradication,” noted Ethiopia RTA Teshome Gebre. “These incentives include Guinea worm eradication hats, cloth, and T-shirts. We also plan to offer training opportunities and certificates of achievement.”

Working in war-ridden Sudan presents special challenges. Fighting often prevents workers from reaching remote areas that may be infected. Most of the world’s remaining Guinea worm cases are in Sudan.

“I believe progress can be made toward eradicating Guinea worm, even under current circumstances,” said Elvin Hilyer, an RTA in northern Sudan.

“However, eradication will come only after all parts of the country are accessible.”

The RTA for southern Sudan, Ross Cox, agreed. “Eradication efforts are taking hold in areas not so hard hit by famine and war. Some parts of Sudan have the capacity to move ahead and become more self-sufficient.”



Robert Grossman

RTAs use tools like this illustration to show people how they become infected with Guinea worm disease.

After the Guinea worm conference, the RTAs took CNN staff and several Peace Corps volunteers to Nerenikoro, a remote village deep in the bush in southeastern Mali. Residents there had not experienced a Guinea worm case in more than 20 years and thought they had eliminated it. Not surprisingly, the community no longer took preventive measures against the disease. Then, in 1997, four villagers became infected. A stranger

walking along a path near their farmland probably contaminated their water supply.

The Nerenikoro experience illustrates the need for a final assault to wipe out Guinea worm. “When you get down to 100 cases in an entire nation, people often assume they’ve achieved victory and then back away from strict adherence to prevention,” said Mark Pelletier, RTA in Uganda. “The next thing you know, you’ve got an outbreak in a village like Nerenikoro, which thought it was free of the disease. It’s proof that until every Guinea worm is gone, the threat remains.” ■

