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### Press Room

## GHIT Fund Steps Up Battle Against Neglected Diseases With Continued Investments to Move Promising Research Through the Pipeline

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*Investments include ongoing funding for a single-dose antimalarial that is one of GHIT Fund’s most advanced programs to-date, as well as new and continued funding for drugs and vaccines to combat malaria, tuberculosis and dengue*

**TOKYO, JAPAN** (October 5, 2016)—The Global Health Innovative Technology Fund (GHIT Fund), a Japanese public-private partnership formed to battle infectious diseases around the globe, today announced six investments, totaling US\$11.4 million. This round includes continued funding for a single-dose antimalarial that has progressed quickly through GHIT Fund’s portfolio stages, beginning as one of its first-ever investments three years ago, and today being one of the most advanced projects thus far. It has potential to counter growing resistance, which threatens recent progress against the disease.

The announcement made today by the GHIT Fund, an organization that combines Japanese innovation with groundbreaking research from across the globe, also includes investments in developing two other antimalarial drugs, and treatments and vaccines for tuberculosis and dengue fever.

#### **Malaria: A Killer that Comes Back**

While existing malaria tools have helped reduce the burden of malaria, it still kills nearly half a million people each year, mostly young children in sub-Saharan Africa. Unlike measles and other diseases that have been successfully controlled by vaccines, malaria can infect the same person over and over again, and has thus far resisted the best scientific efforts to create a highly effective vaccine. With repeated infections, patients gradually develop some degree of immunity, but for children infected for the first time, malaria is particularly deadly. Equally worrisome, mosquitoes carrying the parasite, as well as the parasite itself, are increasingly growing resistant to existing insecticides, medicines and other control strategies.

Currently, malaria is treated with a cocktail of different drugs administered daily, sometimes intravenously, over multiple days. An effective single-dose treatment could reduce the need for costly clinic visits—a necessity in the poorest regions of the world, where malaria strikes hardest—and could enhance compliance with antimalarial drug regimens, a critical factor in slowing development of drug resistance.

New, effective treatments for malaria are desperately needed to combat drug resistance, and since GHIT Fund’s launch three years ago, it has invested in a partnership between the Swiss-based Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV), a leading product development partnership (PDP) in the field of antimalarial drug research and development, and Daiichi Sankyo Company, Ltd., one of the major pharmaceutical companies in Japan, to develop just such medicines. The resulting drug discovery project has, with today’s continued investment of US\$1.8 million, progressed through GHIT Fund’s product development stages. The project, which initially started with a screening of 50,000 compounds designed

by Daiichi Sankyo, aims to identify new drugs that could cure infected patients of both *Plasmodium falciparum* and *Plasmodium vivax* in just one dose, as well as prevent transmission from one infected patient to the next, and provide protection from relapses and future infection.

“The malaria parasite has been a terrible foe to the world’s medical community, constantly evolving and shifting to develop resistance to even our best medicines,” said GHIT Fund Executive Director and CEO Dr. BT Slingsby. “We’re immensely proud of the strides that MMV and Daiichi Sankyo have made since our initial funding three years ago to develop a new, effective antimalarial, and regard its progress as a testament to the success of GHIT Fund’s pipeline in advancing drug discovery and development. But more importantly, we look forward to the day when this and other projects can save lives—something that won’t be possible without continued investment and collaborative research across the globe.”

GHIT Fund also announced two other antimalarial investments today. One, for US\$7.5 million, will go to a Takeda Pharmaceuticals, Japan’s largest pharmaceutical company, and MMV to investigate a drug known as DSM421, part of the DHODH inhibitor program that currently includes DSM265 as the lead compound in development as a possible single-dose cure for malaria. This investment will support progression of DSM421 up to Phase IIa clinical trials.

The second, for US\$0.6 million will go to Japan’s Mitsubishi Tanabe Pharma Corporation and MMV as part of GHIT Fund’s Hit-to-Lead platform, which optimizes the hit chemical compounds that were identified in the screening platform.

### **Ramping up Research for Dengue Fever and Tuberculosis**

Dengue fever, an infection that, like malaria, is transmitted by mosquitoes, has spread dramatically in recent decades. More than half the world’s population is now at risk. Recognizing the magnitude of the threat, GHIT Fund has, over the past three years, awarded investments to several groups working on dengue vaccines. Today’s announcement includes a new investment of US\$1 million for a project led by a Maryland drug company, VLP Therapeutics, in collaboration with Nagasaki University and the National Institute of Infectious Diseases in Japan, for preclinical research of a novel vaccine for dengue that uses what’s known as “virus-like particle” (VLP) technology. Vaccines based on VLP are known to be especially strong in eliciting immune responses. A VLP-based dengue vaccine could potentially require fewer immunizations over a shorter period of time.

GHIT Fund is also ramping up its investments to combat tuberculosis, a disease that infects 9.6 million people and kills more than 1.5 million of them each year, and which currently lacks an effective vaccine or safe, easy-to-use treatments. Today’s GHIT’s investments include US\$0.4 million to researchers at the University of Tokyo, the Universiti Sains Malaysia, Instituto de Nutrición “Salvador Zubirán” in Mexico, and Universidad de Concepción in Chile, for an early-stage vaccine that would be given intranasally, making it easier to administer and less costly than the standard injectable vaccine.

Finally, researchers at the Japan-based RIKEN Center for Life Science Technologies and the United Nations’ International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, Cape Town component, will receive US\$0.2 million to explore how tuberculosis survives and replicates in humans, particularly in those who, while infected with latent tuberculosis, stay immune their entire lives. Researchers believe such study could lead to new, more effective drugs for tuberculosis.

\*All amounts listed at the exchange rate of USD1 = JPY100

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