

# Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, PhD

## *Recipient of the 2011 Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Humanitarian Award*

**T**he recipient of the 2011 Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Humanitarian Award, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, is the Minister of Health of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia. A pioneer in malaria research, Dr. Tedros has devoted his life to public service and scientific research. Prior to his appointment as Health Minister in 2005, Dr. Tedros served in a number of expert and leadership positions within the Ministry at both federal and regional levels including as Minister of State and Head of the Tigray Regional Health Bureau.

Dr. Tedros is recognized for his leadership in the rapidly evolving field of global health, and has worked to enhance Ethiopia's active engagement in major international forums. He has been serving as the Board Chair of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria since July 2009 and has also been representing Ethiopia as the Chair of the Fourth Conference of Ministers of Health of the African Union (CAMH4) since May 2009. At the national level, he also serves on a number of leading advisory bodies, including as Board Chair of the Addis Ababa University. Through all his appointments and activities, he has kept his eye on the prize: Bringing about a real and lasting improvement in the health conditions of his own country.

"In his five years as Ethiopia's Minister of Health," says Dr. John Hardman, President and CEO of The Carter Center, Dr. Tedros "has embarked on an ambitious effort to improve the health of Ethiopians through efforts to address specific diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, and to improve the structure and capacity of Ethiopia for health services, with a special emphasis on maternal care." Building a strong national health system and protecting Ethiopians at

risk is at the core of Dr. Tedros' mission. Backed by his government's commitment to improving health outcomes, Minister Tedros has led the implementation of an 'integrated health system strengthening approach' to health delivery—an approach which recognizes the indispensability of a robust and well-functioning national health system for scaling up access to health services. His leadership has contributed to major gains made towards achieving the goal of providing universal access to primary health care. This effort is being driven by Ethiopia's community-based health extension program (HEP), which is viewed as the bedrock of Ethiopia's decentralized health system. HEP provides a pair of full-time, salaried civil service staffers to work with communities and help deliver a package of health promotion and disease prevention interventions. To date, the program has trained and deployed over 34,000 community-based health extension workers throughout the country—almost doubling Ethiopia's health workforce in a matter of a few years. The institutionalization of this program is viewed as key to its early success and long-term sustainability.

The results so far have been impressive. Dramatic gains have been made in controlling malaria. Defeating malaria, Dr. Tedros said, "is one of Ethiopia's top health priorities... Ethiopia is addressing malaria through social mobilization." In 2005, Minister Tedros spearheaded Ethiopia's overarching goal of universal bednet coverage across the country. The target to distribute 20 million long-lasting insecticide bednets (LLINs)—designed to provide protection for an estimated 50 million persons at risk of malaria—was achieved by July 2007. "This was," Dr. Hardman says, "one of the most ambitious and successful efforts in public health his-

tory.” To accomplish the monumental task, Dr. Tedros convinced one group of organizations to provide the enormous number of LLINs and another group to carry out the complex job of distributing the nets and evaluating their efficacy. He also saw to it that his own government provided the resources. Because of his efforts, Ethiopia moved from 6% LLIN coverage in 2005—to nearly 70% coverage in 2008.

HIV-related deaths and cases have also been on the decline. Under Minister Tedros’ stewardship, The Carter Center notes that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among Ethiopia’s adult population has fallen from 6.6% in 2002 to 2.3% in 2009. And over the same period, access to anti-retroviral therapy has been expanded from a few thousand to hundreds of thousands.

With a combination of interventions, under-five and maternal mortality have also dropped significantly. “Indeed, we believe that the vast potential of our health extension program remains largely untapped,” says Minister Tedros. “With stronger support and the right tools at their disposal, the prospects of what these ‘agents of change’ can achieve along with their communities has greatly motivated... all in our public health sector.” According to Dr. R.J. Simonds, Acting Director of the Center for Global Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the successful implementation of the training program is a credit to Dr. Tedros’ “vision and foresight, and evidence of his determination to ensure Ethiopians and others in the region live healthier and longer lives.”

Meeting the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals targets, particularly for maternal and child health, are



Ethiopia’s top priorities over the coming years. Efforts are currently being stepped up to build on the gains in child health by strengthening community-based management of common childhood illnesses, including pneumonia, expanding measles immunization, and strengthening newborn care capacities at all levels. Dr. Tedros acknowledges that achieving maternal health targets is a big challenge. But he is also optimistic about the renewed efforts that he has been leading building a ‘women-centered’ health system which empowers women and mothers to look after their health and that of their families.

His active engagement in health governance at the international level has also helped to strengthen partnerships with a diverse array of bilateral and multilateral agencies, international non-governmental organizations and private foundations at country-level. In addition to his current global health leadership roles, Dr. Tedros previously represented Ethiopia in a number of other leading international forums, including as Chair of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership (RBM) until May, 2009 and as Chair of the UNAIDS Programme Coordination Board (PCB) from January to December, 2009. In addition, he was also Co-Chair of the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) from 2005 until December, 2009. In 2009, he also served as a member of the High-Level Task Force for Innovative Financing for Health Systems, co-chaired by World Bank President Robert Zoellick and UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown. He has also served as member of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) Board as well as the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation Board.

Science and medicine fascinated Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus for a long time. As a college student at Asmara University, he majored in biology. He graduated in 1986 and went on to receive a Master of Science degree in Immunology of Infectious Diseases at the University of London in 1992 and a PhD in Community Health at the University of Nottingham in 2000. He has provided the global scientific community with valuable malaria research and has published articles on his findings in publications such as the *Annals of Tropical Medicine and Parasitology*, *Nature and Parasitologia*, and *The Lancet*. In a 1999 issue of the *British Medical Journal* Dr. Tedros published a major study of malaria incidence among young people residing near dams in northern Ethiopia. For that work he was named Young Investigator of the Year by the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. In 2003, he was also named Young Public Health Researcher in 2003 by the Ethiopian Public Health Association.

Asked about challenges for the future, Dr. Tedros said, "There are a number of challenges but we are stepping up our efforts to meet them." He reiterated that the community-based health extension workers are making great strides in educating Ethiopians about healthy living. "Then," he said "there is the challenge of implementing our newly-designed public health management systems. We have designed a new early warning and surveillance system to detect epidemics as early as possible. We are also revamping our health information management system to ensure timely and accurate reporting of essential data at all levels. We have streamlined our health commodities supply chain and logistics management systems and initiated several measures to strengthen our health workforce. Clearly, implementation of these newly redesigned systems will take time, but we have begun work in earnest and are confident that it can be done."

He also has put into place a program to train students in public health emergency management. According to The Carter Center, Dr. Tedros has accelerated training pro-

grams to produce more than 5,000 new graduates who will oversee more than 5,000 community health centers. This ambitious project demanded a complete restructuring of the country's health curriculum for non-physician training and a renewed focus on community service.

While he is always clear about his country's most pressing public health problems, Dr. Tedros has also been supporting the control and elimination of neglected tropical diseases. One of the most noteworthy programs which has benefitted from his support, says The Carter Center's Dr. Hardman, is the Guinea Worm Eradication Program and the Trachoma Control Program that is designed to eliminate blinding trachoma. Under Dr. Tedros' leadership treatments for trachoma have proliferated—from 1.7 million in 2005 to more than 13 million annually. And more than 1 million latrines have been built in the Amhara regional state alone.

So what does such a busy Health Minister do for leisure? "I try to spend the little spare time I have with my family," says Dr. Tedros, who is married and has four sons and one daughter. "But of course, given the demands of my work they always complain that the time I spend with them is not enough." An avid reader, Dr. Tedros says he also enjoys reading all sorts of books in his free time, and tries to keep abreast of current affairs and "...developments in all spheres of our world. My ultimate dream is to see our beloved Ethiopia become a healthy and prosperous country. I hope very much to see this within my lifetime. I truly believe there are no limits to what we can achieve for our country if we all resolve to work together."

"Minister Tedros has brought to his job enthusiasm born of personal experience working on public health programs in the field, a technical knowledge of many diseases and their transmission, vision and leadership and a commitment to serve the people of Ethiopia," says Dr. Hardman. "Any one of these alone would warrant accolades, but the long-term impact of these in combination has the potential to transform Ethiopia and to present a model of leadership, courage and devotion to health for all in Africa."