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NEWS RELEASE

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## **NEW REPORT ON CHILDHOOD CANCER SHOWS EARLY DETECTION CAN SAVE THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN'S LIVES**

**WORLD CANCER DAY - SATURDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2006**

The International Union Against Cancer (UICC), a Geneva-based NGO, will launch a new report, *Childhood Cancer: Rising to the Challenge*, on World Cancer Day. Findings from the report show that childhood cancer is the second highest cause of death in children and more than 160,000 children are newly diagnosed with cancer each year.<sup>1</sup> In developing countries roughly 60 per cent of children with cancer still die of their disease, as opposed to 25 per cent in the developed world. But significant advances in diagnosis and therapy during the past four decades mean that childhood cancer can largely be cured if detected early. That is why UICC and its cancer-fighting organisations are dedicating this year's **World Cancer Day** to childhood cancer and the importance of early detection and equal access to treatment.

"Too many children are unnecessarily dying each year, since they are never diagnosed or diagnosed too late. Knowing the common signs and symptoms of childhood cancer is one of the most important steps in fighting this disease and saving thousands of children's lives each year," says Isabel Mortara, Executive Director, UICC.

The prevalence and types of childhood cancer differ between populations and ages, however in around 85 per cent of all cases, one or more of the following symptoms are usually present:<sup>2</sup>

- Continued, unexplained weight loss and fever
- Pallor
- Headaches, often with early-morning vomiting
- Unusual swelling or abdominal mass
- Swollen head
- Development of excessive bruising or bleeding
- Sudden changes in balance or behaviour
- White glow in the eye

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<sup>1</sup> International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), 2002. The exact number of new cases is not known because in many countries not all children with cancer are registered.

<sup>2</sup> International Society of Pediatric Oncology (SIOP), 2003

## **NEW REPORT ON CHILDHOOD CANCER SHOWS EARLY DETECTION CAN SAVE THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN'S LIVES/2**

"Most of the symptoms of cancer can be interpreted as common childhood ailments," says Dr John Seffrin, President, UICC. "It is therefore extremely important for parents to take their child to a physician for further investigation, if any of these symptoms appear. Parents must insist that, where possible, physicians carry out tests to rule out cancer."

UICC and its members around the world will run World Cancer Day under the slogan "My Child Matters". Members are organising a wide range of activities and fundraising events to educate parents about early detection and to join together to celebrate the lives of children who are fighting against the disease.

On World Cancer Day, UICC will launch 14 projects in 10 low- and middle-income countries to help improve early detection, treatment, care and support of children with cancer. The chosen countries are Bangladesh, Egypt, Honduras, Morocco, Philippines, Senegal, Tanzania, Ukraine, Venezuela and Vietnam. "Across the world, we need to ensure that the survival rates of childhood cancer are increased. In developing countries, where over 80 per cent of children with cancer live and survival rates are lowest, governments have limited funding for health projects. This is why UICC is leading this initiative to help save children's lives. These projects will help communicate the message that childhood cancer can be treated and is often curable," says Dr Franco Cavalli, Chair of the UICC Childhood Cancer Campaign Advisory Committee.<sup>3</sup>

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### **Notes to Editor**

#### **About UICC**

The International Union Against Cancer (UICC) is the only international non-governmental organisation that is dedicated solely to the global control of cancer. Its vision is of a world where cancer is eliminated as a major life-threatening disease for future generations. With more than 270 cancer-fighting organisations in over 80 countries, UICC is a resource for action and a voice for change. For further information visit: [www.uicc.org](http://www.uicc.org) or [www.mychildmatters.org](http://www.mychildmatters.org)

#### **About the *Childhood Cancer: Rising to the Challenge* report**

This state-of-the-art report, with contributions from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the International Psycho-Oncology Society (IPOS), details statistics on childhood cancer, covers psychosocial aspects, and focuses on the health situation in the 10 developing countries where UICC will run 14 projects to improve early diagnosis, treatment, care, and support of children with cancer. It also concludes that good-quality statistics on childhood cancer are more difficult to obtain than in adults, therefore there is an urgent need to set up cancer registers across the world. The '*Childhood Cancer: Rising to the Challenge*' report, funded by sanofi-aventis, is available on request.

Also available upon request is "Putting Cancer on the Global Agenda", a UICC video news release discussing the burden of childhood cancer in the developing world.

To find out what activities will be taking place in your country on World Cancer Day, please contact us.

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<sup>3</sup> Funding of these projects is made possible by sanofi-aventis, with additional support from the National Cancer Institute, USA

## **SUPPORTERS OF WORLD CANCER DAY 2006**

### **BARBARA BUSH**

Barbara Bush, former United States First Lady, is a mother who lost her young daughter to leukemia. Knowing first hand what it is like to lose a child to cancer, she is a dedicated cancer advocate who strongly supports efforts to educate parents about childhood cancer.

"When our daughter was first diagnosed with leukemia we had never heard of the disease and felt very helpless and dependent on the physicians," remembers Barbara Bush. "Forty years ago survival rates were very low and despite different medical treatments, our daughter Robin unfortunately died.

It was extremely difficult for the whole family to lose someone we all loved so dearly, someone who had her entire future ahead of her. We decided the best way to save our daughter's memory was to make this tragedy a positive experience by raising awareness of the disease so that other children would have a chance to live. I would like to encourage all parents to take the time to familiarise themselves with the most common symptoms. With early detection and the treatments available today, most children diagnosed with cancer have a good chance of surviving and of living an active life," says Mrs. Bush.

### **FRANZ BECKENBAUER**

Franz Beckenbauer, football legend and Chair of the Organising Committee of the 2006 FIFA World Cup™ strongly supports World Cancer Day 2006. "As a father, I fully endorse the goal of educating parents around the world about the most common warning signs of childhood cancer, so that children have a better chance of surviving their disease. Given that the life of a young cancer survivor will often change after recovery, I believe that active participation in group sports can be an important factor for a cancer survivor to re-socialise with other children and help live life to the full," says Franz Beckenbauer.

### **GARY LINEKER**

International football star Gary Lineker is supporting World Cancer Day 2006. "As a father of four, including a son who survived leukaemia, I fully endorse the goal of educating parents around the world about the most common signs and symptoms of childhood cancer, so that they too can help their children live life to the full. My family and I are proud to support a campaign that aims to raise awareness of childhood cancer. We believe that children with cancer should never stop having hope and dreaming of their future life," says Gary Lineker.

### **STÉPHANE LAMBIEL**

Stéphane Lambiel, World Figure Skating Champion 2005, found time in his intensive training for the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin to give his passionate support to World Cancer Day.

"Cancer is a terrible thing at any age, but especially among the very young. My heart goes out to those children in many countries - the little princes and princesses of our world - who get cancer but don't get the early diagnosis and prompt and effective treatment they need to save their lives."

"Efforts to improve knowledge about childhood cancer and directly tackle misconceptions, for example that cancer is contagious, are vital," says Stéphane.

In many societies, there is still a stigma attached to cancer. While some families acknowledge an enormous debt to friends who helped them through the cancer experience, others suggest that managing the disease was made harder because of prejudices and a lack of support from others.