

African Society of Venimology Excluded from Snakebite Agenda at World Health Assembly

5/22/2016 *The crisis is African, and sub-Saharan voices should be heard.*

GENEVA– The African Society of Venimology (ASV) objects strenuously to being excluded from the agenda of the May 25 World Health Assembly meeting on the international crisis in antivenom for venomous snakebite.

One million African people are bitten by venomous snakes, each year. Twenty five to thirty thousand die. More than ten thousand suffer permanent disability from loss of limbs. But only a small fraction have access to effective antivenom, because of long-term shortages resulting from an ineffective supply chain.



ASV's membership includes physicians, scientists and public health professionals who live in sub-Saharan Africa. We have seen first hand the impact of snakebite injury on our patients and on our communities. We have conducted epidemiological studies, clinical trials of antivenoms, professional workshops and training sessions for healthcare workers throughout the region. Our patients, colleagues, and political authorities are all aware of the situation and want to work toward solutions.

ASV's in-depth analysis of the shortage reveals that it is perpetuated by a vicious circle of local market failure, supply inefficiency and loss of confidence by physicians and patients. The vicious circle can be overcome only through intensive local management of technological and therapeutic improvements. But African voices are seldom heard in international discussion of these topics, because our participation is limited by the same geography, infrastructure and economics that have caused the shortage.

Eighteen health ministries, 12 of them African, requested that the 2016 World Health Assembly include a technical meeting that would convey greater visibility of the issue, on behalf of those in need of support, and that would communicate these perspectives clearly. Organization of the event was expected to be by the World Health Organization, with broad representation from member countries. ASV members looked forward to the event as an opportunity where we would at last have a chance to share our findings and recommendations.



“We were greatly disappointed to discover, days before the opening of the meeting, that its organization has been delegated to the Costa Rican government, which has a conflict of interest through its oversight of an antivenom production facility that does business in Africa,” said Achille Massougbodji, President of the ASV. “Furthermore, the practical recommendations of ASV have simply disappeared from the program, leaving a business-as-usual proposal for an ‘integrated response’ that will presumably concentrate resources where they have always been – outside of Africa’s reach.

It is time to give those who fight, without resources or support, against a scourge that overwhelms them since time immemorial, a voice.”

For more information in English or French, contact Jean-Philippe Chippaux at jean-philippe.chippaux@ird.fr. Dr. Chippaux is a founding member of the ASV. Interviews, in French, may also be arranged with ASV President Achille Massougbodji (Benin), at massougbodjiachille@yahoo.fr. Additional interviews may be arranged on request, with representatives from Kenya, Ghana, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Mali.