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## News Release

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### **Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, Proposes the Creation of a Global Alliance for the Elimination of Schistosomiasis**

- **Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, calls on different NTD constituencies to join and support WHO's ambitious goal of schistosomiasis elimination**

Darmstadt, Germany / Geneva, Switzerland, May 20, 2014 – Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, proposed the creation of a global alliance to help the World Health Organization (WHO) achieve its goal of eliminating schistosomiasis worldwide today in Geneva.

Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, will be a founding member of this new global alliance aiming to further support WHO's goal of eliminating schistosomiasis. Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, calls for different NTD (neglected tropical diseases) constituencies to join on focusing efforts to address remaining gaps and challenges to meet the elimination target. Stefan Oschmann, member of the Executive Board of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, and CEO Pharma, presented this initiative on the occasion of the 67<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly, the decision-making body of WHO, in the presence of H.E. Hanny-Sherry Ayithey, Minister of Health of Ghana, and Dr. Hiroki Nakatani, Assistant Director-General Neglected Tropical Diseases of WHO.

Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is committed to helping WHO to eliminate the worm disease schistosomiasis in Africa. As an important part of its responsible entrepreneurship, the company launched the Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, Praziquantel Donation Program in 2007. Praziquantel is well tolerated and the most effective treatment to date for schistosomiasis. Since then, more than 38 million children have been treated and over 160 million tablets have been donated.

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While other neglected tropical diseases have demonstrated the value of inclusive alliances, as of today no alliance for schistosomiasis yet exists. “We see this initiative as a major development,” said Oschmann. “This alliance will allow the different constituencies to engage in a coordinated approach to best address the challenges on how to meet the elimination target.” Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, will work with WHO and partners to define the appropriate structure of this alliance to ensure its pragmatic operational functionality.

“We need to keep up the momentum in translating our commitments into actions, with our commitment to raise our annual donation up to 250 million tablets by 2016. We also need to ensure that our donation benefits the maximum number of children. The global alliance is a new opportunity to bring together all interested partners and create a new turning point for the elimination of schistosomiasis,” said Oschmann. “Providing the drug praziquantel is only one part of the solution; we therefore recognize the need to go beyond this and foster a holistic, integrated approach to supporting WHO in reaching the ultimate elimination target.”

### **Schistosomiasis**

Schistosomiasis is a chronic disease recognized as the second most prevalent and devastating parasitic disease in tropical countries after malaria. It is estimated that more than 240 million people are infected and that around 200,000 die from it each year. This chronic disease, which is transmitted from parasitic worms, is widespread in tropical and subtropical regions where poor populations have no access to clean water and sanitary installations. People become infected with the disease by worm larvae mainly in freshwater, for example while working, swimming, fishing or washing their clothes. The miniscule larvae penetrate human skin, enter the blood vessels and attack internal organs. The infection rate is particularly high among children of school age.

Praziquantel, the only drug available to treat all forms of schistosomiasis, is designated by WHO as the “drug of choice”, providing a cost effective health solution to patients in need.

### **The Praziquantel Donation Program**

The Praziquantel Donation Program of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, was launched in 2007 in partnership with WHO. Since then more than 160 million tablets have been supplied and over 38 million children have been treated. In 2013, the company’s annual donation doubled to 50 million tablets. At the beginning of 2012 Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, announced that it will fight schistosomiasis until the disease will be eliminated in Africa. To reach this goal the company will increase the annual donation up to 250 million tablets in the medium term. The further scale-up of the program will allow treatment of about 100 million children a year. The expanded Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, Praziquantel Donation Program will result in a financial commitment totaling around \$ 23 million a year. In addition, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is also supporting an awareness program in African schools to explain the causes of schistosomiasis to children and teach them how to prevent the disease. To date, WHO has used the educational material in pilot projects in Senegal and Malawi. Furthermore, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is conducting research on a



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pediatric formulation of praziquantel for preschool children within the scope of a public-private partnership. So far, praziquantel tablets can only be administered to children over the age of six.

For more information about the fight against schistosomiasis, please click [here](#).

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### **About Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany**

Merck KGaA of Darmstadt, Germany, is a leading company for innovative and top-quality high-tech products in the pharmaceutical and chemical sectors. Its subsidiaries in Canada and the United States operate under the umbrella brand EMD. Around 38,000 employees work in 66 countries to improve the quality of life for patients, to further the success of customers and to help meet global challenges. The company generated total revenues of € 11.1 billion in 2013 with its four divisions: Biopharmaceuticals, Consumer Health, Performance Materials and Life Science Tools. Merck KGaA of Darmstadt, Germany is the world's oldest pharmaceutical and chemical company – since 1668, the name has stood for innovation, business success and responsible entrepreneurship. Holding an approximately 70 percent interest, the founding family remains the majority owner of the company to this day.