

# \$14.02 bn promised for global fight against AIDS, TB, malaria

## France offers to contribute an extra \$60 million

**LYON:** Governments, businesses and philanthropists pledged just over \$14 billion yesterday to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, exceeding the target set for a replenishment meeting in Lyon, France. "I am delighted to be able to tell you that having set a target of raising at least \$14 billion... we have today secured pledges, commitments for \$14.02 billion," the fund's chief executive officer Peter Sands announced.

Standing next to conference host Emmanuel Macron, Sands said there had been increases in the pledges of all the G7 bloc of rich countries, 20 donations from African governments, and 11 new donors from the private sector. Sands was speaking shortly after Macron had officially announced the final tally of \$13.92 billion, just short of the target. Conference organizers said \$14 billion would help save 16 million lives and avert 234 million infections by 2023.

Macron, who in the morning described \$14 billion as "the minimum," and warned he would

"not allow anyone to leave this room, nor Lyon, until the \$14 billion has been obtained", said several countries had increased their pledges during the day. African countries have promised double the amount they pledged at the fund's last meeting in Montreal three years ago, he said. "When there is common cause, we know how to reconcile," he said, thanking Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, who contributed \$50 million each.

The total of all the pledges came to \$13.8 billion, Macron said. France offered to contribute an extra \$60 million from its own coffers, which billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates agreed to match for a total of \$13.92 billion. Macron said he was "convinced" the shortfall would be made up within weeks as more donors come forward. Just minutes later, however, Sands said all the money had been found. This was despite government officials having predicted that collecting such a large sum would likely be challenging, especially as global attention moves from AIDS towards fighting climate change.—AFP



**LYON:** French president Emmanuel Macron (left) shakes hands with Global Fund managing director Peter Sands during a press conference at the end of the Global Fund meeting to Fight HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria yesterday. —AFP

## EU removes UAE, Switzerland from tax-haven list

**LUXEMBOURG:** The EU removed Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates from its list of tax havens yesterday, giving two global hubs for multinational tax schemes the all clear. "Albania, Costa Rica, Mauritius, Serbia and Switzerland have implemented ahead of their deadline all necessary reforms to comply with EU tax good governance principles," the bloc's 28 finance ministers said. The EU's grey list has included Switzerland since its launch in December 2017 as the country was deemed as having inadequate tax rules, although it had expressed commitment to reform them. "If Switzerland is off this list, it is a success for me. The best list is the shortest," said Pierre Moscovici, European Commissioner for Economic Affairs, at a press conference in Luxembourg. Switzerland had approved a tax reform in October 2018, but its entry into force had been delayed due to a referendum.

The United Arab Emirates, which includes Dubai, was also given a clean bill of health, lifted out directly from the blacklist after rushing through reforms. "Today, the EU has whitewashed two of the world's most harmful tax havens," said Chiara Putaturo, Oxfam's EU Policy Advisor on Tax. "Despite recent reforms, both countries will continue to offer sweet treats to tax-dodging companies, like very low tax rates, accelerating the race to the bottom on corporate taxation."

The move leaves only nine countries or territories considered to be uncooperative on the list: American Samoa, Belize, Fiji, Guam, Oman, Samoa, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States Virgin Islands and Vanuatu. The 28 EU finance ministers drew up the lists - that followed several scandals including Panama Papers and LuxLeaks - in the hopes of "naming and shaming" countries into better combating tax evasion by multinationals and wealthy individuals. Blacklisted countries face only limited sanctions, consisting of freezing them out of European aid or development funding.—AFP

## Malaysia must scrap 'cruel' death penalty

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysian police sometimes use torture to extract confessions from suspects in death penalty cases and their trials are often unfair, Amnesty International said yesterday, piling pressure on the government to abolish capital punishment. The Southeast Asian country has the death penalty for dozens of crimes and it is mandatory for several offences, including murder and drug trafficking.

A reformist alliance which took power in 2018 pledged to scrap capital punishment entirely, a move that would have handed a reprieve to almost 1,300 people on death row. But after facing opposition, officials announced only the mandatory death penalty for some offences would go, leaving it to judges in such cases to decide whether to order someone to hang or jail them. In a new report, Amnesty said that torture and beatings were sometimes used to force confessions from suspects accused of offences punishable by death.

A Malaysian on death row, who was arrested in possession of methamphetamine in 2005, said police broke his finger during interrogation and he was forced to sign an inaccurate statement, according to Amnesty. It was common for defendants who could not afford a lawyer to go without any legal assistance until charges were brought in court, and they were often left without legal support for long periods, the rights group said.

"From allegations of torture and other ill-treatment to an opaque pardons



**PETALING JAYA:** Shamini Darshni Kaliemuthu (left) and Brian Yap, representatives from Amnesty International Malaysia, attend the launch of a report on the death penalty in Malaysia yesterday. —AFP

process, it's clear the death penalty is a stain on Malaysia's criminal justice system," said Shamini Darshni Kaliemuthu, executive director of Amnesty International Malaysia. "Amnesty International's research shows why this government must now honor its pledge to abolish this ultimate cruel and inhumane punishment without delay."

Legislation to make the changes is expected to be tabled in parliament soon. A moratorium on executions has

been in place since last year, shortly after the new government took power. Amnesty urged the government to take the first step towards total abolition by eliminating the mandatory death penalty entirely, including for drug-related offences, when it puts forward the new legislation. It said 73 percent of those on death row were convicted of drug crimes. The Malaysian law minister's office did not have an immediate response to the report. —AFP