

Africa's Anti-Malaria Concert

Written by Robert ID999

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Some of Africa's top musicians, from Algerian Rai star Khaled to Senegal's Youssou N"Dour, start a two-day concert in Dakar on Saturday to fight malaria, a disease which kills one child every 30 seconds on the continent.

"We speak alot about wiping out poverty, canceling debt, but we also want the world to know that we are taking our own problems in hand," said N"Dour, who became a world star after growing up in Dakar's impoverished Medina neighborhood.

"The effort is not just international. Africans have also tried to find solutions but the burden is enormous," said the Grammy award-winning musician who helped organize the "Africa Live" concert.

Among the artists at the concert are Tinariwen from the sand swept town of Kidal in northeast Mali, a group of former Tuareg rebels who swapped their guns for electric guitars and mix traditional poetry with the rhythmic pulse of desert blues.

Khaled, a defender of human rights who was banned from playing in his homeland, is due to make a guest appearance along with Mali's Salif Keita and Cameroon's Manu Dibango.

Scientists said last week that more than half a billion people, nearly double previous estimates, were affected by the deadliest form of malaria in 2002. Most of them were in sub-Saharan Africa.

KILLER DISEASE

Transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito, malaria kills around 3,000 children every day in Africa, or a total of more than one million people a year, most of them under 5. It affects nearly twice as many people on the continent as tuberculosis, AIDS, measles and leprosy combined.

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Prevention is relatively simple: officials printed leaflets encouraging people to sleep under insecticide-treated mosquito nets and go straight to the doctor if they get fever, one of malaria's initial symptoms.

The organizers expect 40,000 people to attend the concert in Dakar's Iba Mar Diop stadium. It will be made into a television documentary to be broadcast around Europe and Africa, a radio series, DVD and compact disc.

The concert will feature the premiere of an anti-malaria anthem composed by N"Dour, due to be translated into various African languages.

With tickets priced at just 1,000 CFA (\$2), "Africa Live" does not aim to raise a huge amount of money itself for the fight against malaria, but N"Dour said the event would help raise awareness and encourage donors to provide 10 million mosquito nets for Africa in the next two years.

The majority of African families cannot afford a mosquito net, which costs on average between \$2 and \$5, and fewer than 5 percent of African children sleep under a net.

Organizers also say the artists involved will become advocates for the fight against malaria in their home countries, recording public service announcements in local languages and allowing their images to be used in campaigns.

"We've made great strides on eradicating polio. Now it is time to turn to malaria. It perpetuates poverty. It is like a tsunami that takes place in Africa every month," said Kathy Baldwin of the United Nations Foundation, which helped arrange the concert.

The concert is organized by the Roll Back Malaria campaign, which aims to halve malaria deaths by the year 2010 and is sponsored by the World Health Organization, the U.N. Children's Fund, the U.N. Development Programme and the World Bank.

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