**MSF urges J&J to reduce price of TB drug to save lives of vulnerable people in pandemic**

New York, 21 April 2020 – As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to grow, people with respiratory issues and lung damage, such as people with tuberculosis (TB), are at a greater risk of getting sick and dying of COVID-19 disease if infected. There is an urgent need to ensure the continuity of prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and care for people with TB worldwide to reduce this risk, and to make sure they have access to the best-possible treatment.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has been calling on Johnson & Johnson (J&J) to lower the price of the TB drug they produce, bedaquiline, to no more than R19 (US$1) per day for people everywhere who need it. Over 117,000 people have signed on to demand J&J lower the price of bedaquiline to R19 ($1/day).

Ahead of J&J’s annual shareholder meeting on 23 April 2020, MSF sent an open letter to J&J’s CEO Alex Gorsky today, to follow-up on our unanswered letter to the pharmaceutical corporation from September 2018, urging them to make the drug affordable and widely available.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the scale-up of easy-to-use all-oral treatments for drug-resistant TB (DR-TB), as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), is now an imperative that cannot be delayed. Given WHO’s March 2019 guidance recommending bedaquiline as a core drug to treat DR-TB, the persistent poor level of access to this lifesaving drug can no longer be accepted.

Today’s price of bedaquiline remains too high and is a significant barrier to countries’ efforts to scale up access to this drug. Since the launch of bedaquiline in 2012, just over 51,000 people had received it for the treatment of DR-TB by 31 December 2019. This is less than 15% of people with DR-TB that could have benefitted from treatment with bedaquiline.

**Sharonann Lynch, Senior HIV & TB Advisor, MSF Access Campaign:**

“As governments around the world grapple with the spiraling COVID-19 pandemic, it’s crucial to remember that people with TB, if infected, are at increased risk of developing serious forms of this disease. Easy-to-use TB drugs like bedaquiline are essential to keeping people with TB as healthy as possible as they face COVID-19, so this drug needs to be affordable and available. We need to be able to offer people with drug-resistant TB the best possible treatment, which will also eliminate their need to visit health facilities for daily injections of less effective drugs, putting them at greater risk of contracting COVID-19.

Despite our repeated pleas, Johnson & Johnson has still not lowered the price of bedaquiline. It is deplorable that barely 15% of people with DR-TB have benefitted from bedaquiline since the drug was launched over seven years ago.

Given how vulnerable people with TB are during this pandemic, J&J should immediately lower the price of bedaquiline to ‘a dollar a day’ to mitigate this new threat of death and save the lives of thousands of people who will otherwise continue to die from the world's leading infectious disease killer.”