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## **New Tuberculosis Lab Developed in North Korea with Support from NTI's Global Health and Security Initiative**

An unprecedented collaboration between American tuberculosis (TB) experts and doctors from the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea's (North Korea) Ministry of Public Health has developed North Korea's first laboratory for diagnosis of drug-resistant tuberculosis, the U.S. sponsors announced today. A technical laboratory team recently returned from North Korea after initiating the lab installation, a crucial step in the project, which is supported by the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), Christian Friends of Korea (CFK), and the Stanford-led Bay Area TB Consortium (BATC).

"With the emergence of drug resistant forms of TB, international cooperation is essential, and this work is vital to reduce biological risks and advance health security," said former Senator Sam Nunn, co-chairman of NTI's Global Health and Security Initiative (GHSI). "The impact in economic and security terms is very costly, particularly for countries with limited resources. The burden could be catastrophic in the event of a major epidemic or global pandemic causing widespread disruption and human suffering."

After famines plagued North Korea in the 1990's, the country witnessed a resurgence of tuberculosis. The TB Diagnostics Project seeks to strengthen North Korea's ability to detect all forms of the disease and support its treatment and control. The new laboratory will fill a critical gap in their TB control program, according to Stanford epidemiologist Sharon Perry, director of the BATC project.

Dr. Perry, Dr. Louise Gresham, Director of NTI's GHSI, and a technical laboratory team delivered and installed equipment and supplies to the Pyongyang TB Hospital laboratory during a trip in 2009. The team also conducted orientation workshops in cooperation with scientists and doctors from North Korea's Ministry of Public Health. The donated equipment and supplies will be used at the Central Tuberculosis Institute to begin culture and drug susceptibility testing services for tuberculosis patients.

"We have heard for several years about the urgent need for this advanced laboratory and are developing the lab in close partnership with Ministry of Public Health officials," said Heidi Linton, Executive Director of CFK. "We will return in the spring to complete additional work, and look forward to our continuing collaboration."

The project, launched in 2008, is backed by NTI's Global Health and Security Initiative, which works to prevent, detect and respond to biological threats around the world. In addition to NTI, the effort includes members of the Stanford-led Bay Area TB Consortium, a group of medical professionals, and CFK, a humanitarian group operating in North Korea for 15 years. When the lab facility is completed in the capital of Pyongyang, it will give North Korea effective tools to diagnose TB including drug-resistant forms of the disease.

“Without these services, which are considered standard of care in the West, only about 50 percent of TB is detected, and the types of drugs needed to effectively treat the disease cannot be determined,” said Gary Schoolnik, professor of medicine and senior scientist for the Stanford TB team.

“This effort represents an unprecedented level of cooperation between the U.S. partners and the North Korean Ministry of Public Health,” said Stanford Professor Emeritus John Lewis, director of the project on Peace and Cooperation in the Asian-Pacific Region.

NTI and its Global Health and Security Initiative support the North Korea TB Project through the Stanford School of Medicine. Other GHSI projects that bring together public health experts to enhance cooperation in dealing with infectious diseases include the Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance (MECIDS) involving Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, and the Mekong Basin Disease Surveillance Network involving Cambodia, China, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand.

For more information on NTI's Global Health and Security Initiative, please visit [www.ghsi.org](http://www.ghsi.org)

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