

As African Cup of Nations (AFCON) kicks off in Côte D'Ivoire in the coming days, political, sporting and cultural legends are gathering to highlight the ongoing fight against malaria in the Ivory Coast and throughout the continent.

The RBM Partnership to End Malaria and Zero Malaria F.C. – an initiative co-captained by football icons Luís Figo and Khalilou Fadiga – is engaging with players, fans and key stakeholders at the upcoming major tournament, to raise awareness to the disease and urge greater action.

As 24 nations will be represented in this year's AFCON tournament and more than 1.5 million visitors are expected to attend the competition in Côte D'Ivoire, the Ministry of Health and Public Hygiene of Côte d'Ivoire and the RBM Partnership to End Malaria hosted a press conference on January 10 to raise awareness of the disease and urge greater action.

“Malaria does not discriminate. Malaria does not spare and malaria continues to spread. We all know that, unfortunately, Africa bears almost the entire burden of this disease on a global scale. However, despite this dark picture, we must remain hopeful and act. Because everyone, whether in this room, in front of your screens, in the stadiums and in the communities, has a role to play in putting an end to this disease,” Pierre N'Gou Dimba, Minister of Health and Public Hygiene of Côte d'Ivoire said.

Globally in 2022, there were an estimated 249 million malaria cases and 608 000 malaria deaths in 85 countries.

The African continent carries a disproportionately high share of the global malaria burden. In 2022, the continent was home to 94% of malaria cases (233 million) and 95% (580 000) of malaria deaths.

By convening decision-makers, football stars and key donors, the partnership aims to leverage on the power of collectiveness to achieve Africa and the world's global goals.

“Malaria is a burden which weighs heavily on the continent's best players, fans and people in communities vulnerable to the disease. The fight against malaria takes place inside and outside the stadiums, and prevention is a key aspect if we are to defeat it. We need people to come together from all aspects of society – political, cultural and of course sporting as we celebrate the African Cup of Nations. It is only

by working together in concerted joint action, that we can achieve our mission,” added Dr Michael Adekunle Charles, CEO of the RBM Par

The partnership to end malaria is continuing to call on donor countries, leaders and policymakers to increase their support in the fight to eradicate malaria around the world in 2024 and beyond.

“This huge AFCON that Ivory Coast is about to host in a few days, is a crucial event and we must know seize this opportunity to call on as much people as we can.” Added Benoît Verdeaux, First Consellor of the Ambassador to France in Côte d’Ivoire.

Zero Malaria F.C. launched on World Malaria Day last year.

Football icons Jay-Jay Okocha and Kader Keita have already joined the team and on January 10th 2024, international artist Didi B joined the F.C. to support awareness and youth engagement across Africa and the world.