



Professor Brendan Crabb AC
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“The status quo is not ok. This was a theme that emerged from this meeting as the central driving force behind almost every point that was made. It was used as a quote by Pedro Alonso from the World Health Organization and many speakers across various sessions at this 1st Malaria World Congress – that the status quo is not ok.

“It seems a little strange that it has become such a central sentiment given that we are actually ecstatic at the progress that has been made in the last 10-15 years, and as Professor Sir Richard Feachem explained, over many decades.

“So many lives saved, so many deaths averted, so much human opportunity provided by that success. So a seemingly negative comment, like the status quo is not ok, business as usual won’t do it, is a little bit odd.

“Why has it resonated so strongly among us? Is it the issue of stalling, that the progress we refer to is flat lining in certain circumstances and all that we know that that means with a resurgence of malaria? Is it simply that despite the progress there is still monumental human tragedy playing out every day?

“I’ve done some media over the past two weeks and after one of the interviews I left feeling a little uncomfortable. During that TV interview on the bottom of the screen there was a caption (news ticker) that related to the tragic shooting deaths of five people in a town outside Washington (USA). That was the breaking news story for that morning, an understandably big issue. I realised I was uncomfortable because during the interview I had pointed out that 1200 tragic deaths (from malaria) would have occurred just in that one day, and it will happen again tomorrow and the day after.

“So there has been a lot of talk about the invisibility of malaria. So is the status quo not ok because of our deep sense of outrage at that?

“Another way of looking at it is that when you try and do something really ambitious, go to the moon, or a living example that I have witnessed is the sequencing of the human genome, you have a couple of options. You can ‘get all your ducks in a row’ and commit, or commit with almost having no idea how you are going to get there and then you try and get ‘all your ducks in a row’.

“There has been debate about whether communities are committed to elimination and eradication of malaria, but I don’t think there is any debate any more.

“We’ve made a decision as a community that that decision has been made. But we don’t really know how to do it. We don’t have ‘all your ducks in a row’ both technologically and in other places.

“There are huge challenges to deliver even by some of the timeframes that we are discussing. So we should take away that the status quo is not ok, and a positive message that the commitment that we’ve made and the urgency is centred on that so many lives, so much suffering depends on us acting, and acting vigorously.

“We can get caught up with what those ‘ducks’ are. But its important – and this is what the Statement of Action tries to capture – that it is not the specifics as much as the culture that’s going to drive our response. Culture and defining the values that we as a community have is what will give us the motivation to finish the job in the countries that need the last mile to be achieved and to tackle ‘the hardest first’.

“Not just engaging but putting the vulnerable communities that are the least listened to at the head of the table, to innovate, and to collaborate by disparate groups getting to know each other and value one another before deciding how to collaborate.

“These values are things that we can all embrace, we don’t need to know all the specifics, and create an atmosphere and environment of desperation of trying to achieve what we have all collectively committed to.

“I hope that we hold ourselves to account against the commitments that are in this Statement of Action that you all have committed to.”

ENDS