WE CAN END AVOIDABLE BLINDNESS BY 2020
Many more are visually impaired and need glasses.

What would it be like to watch as your mother or father, or your own child, started to lose their sight?

And all because of a condition that could be treated or prevented.

Together we can act to end avoidable blindness.

Turn the page to see how work is already underway – are you part of it?

80% of global blindness is avoidable.

Or to put it another way, 4 out of 5 people who are blind do not need to be.

Worldwide, that’s approximately 31 million people who are avoidably or needlessly blind.
Approximately 20 million people have already had their sight saved.

Nations all over the world have signed up to the goal of ending avoidable blindness - but there is still a lot to do. Right now we are working on the next phase of the action plan – and it is crucial to get as many people involved as possible.

Will you be part of the worldwide campaign to end avoidable blindness by 2020?
All 194 World Health Organization (WHO) member states are committed to investing in eye health.

Two World Health Assembly resolutions have urged WHO member states to develop and implement VISION 2020 national plans, and WHO to provide technical assistance.

A WHO Action Plan for Prevention of Blindness and Visual Impairment was unanimously adopted at the 2009 World Health Assembly – and sets out the road map to 2013.

Work is now underway on the plan that will take us to 2019 – on the verge of eliminating avoidable blindness.

- OVER 100 COUNTRIES have drafted national eye health plans
- OVER 115 COUNTRIES have formed national prevention of blindness committees
- OVER 150 COUNTRIES have participated in VISION 2020 workshops
Almost 50% of blindness is due to cataract — a clouding of the eye lens.

It’s a natural process that usually comes with age — but in developed countries almost no one goes blind from it. That’s because there is a very simple operation that fixes cataract blindness, by removing the clouded lens and replacing it with a plastic one.

It is relatively straightforward surgery and in some places it can be carried out in as little as four minutes, under local anaesthetic. Skilled surgeons can treat hundreds of people with cataracts per day — and the operation is straightforward enough that other health staff can be trained to perform it.

Clear, proven strategies also exist to control blinding diseases such as trachoma and onchocerciasis (river blindness), including the SAFE (surgery, antibiotics, face-washing, and environmental hygiene) strategy. If fully implemented, this strategy could achieve the elimination of trachoma by 2020.

Ending avoidable blindness does not require a research breakthrough, or any new technology. We already have what we need and we are in sight of a truly remarkable global achievement.
What does action cost?

We can also treat blinding diseases like trachoma and onchocerciasis for as little as 57 cents. Drug donations from pharmaceutical companies are helping to control these and other neglected tropical diseases, delivering public-private partnerships that are treating up to 800 million people.

Many of the eye problems that lead to blindness can be tackled efficiently at the primary level, for example by continuing work to supply fresh water to local communities to assist in the fight to eliminate trachoma.

Cataract is a condition responsible for blinding millions of people, but it is treatable and sight can be restored for as little as $25 in some developing countries.

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A 1983 study in India found that a person who had their sight restored by cataract surgery was able to generate income at 1500% return on the cost of that surgery, within the first year.

In 2006 an estimation of the benefit of the Onchocerciasis Control Program across a number of sub-Saharan African countries anticipated an economic rate of return of 18%.

It has also been estimated that achieving the goal of eliminating avoidable blindness could yield a minimum economic of gain of $102 billion.

Cataract surgery, for example, is considered one of the most cost-effective health interventions – a fact illustrated time and time again in studies conducted over the last 30 years.

Investing in overcoming avoidable blindness can have remarkable outcomes. The economic return on investment is very high.
What Does Inaction Cost?

Doing nothing will cost a lot more than taking action - including significant economic impacts at household and national levels.

Household Costs
Evidence shows that people with visual impairments are less likely to participate in education or health care and this ultimately impacts households financially. Also the household cost of caring for a blind person is estimated to be a minimum 10% of one economically active member of the family. Failure to prevent and control the blinding neglected tropical diseases (trachoma and onchocerciasis) has significant economic consequences for individuals and productivity losses for developing countries. For example, a study of the effects of onchocerciasis on rural households in Guinea found that 21% of people who were blind were economically active compared with 62% with low vision and 98% of sighted people.

National Costs
Countries who fail to take action on avoidable blindness and visual impairment are likely to experience considerable productivity losses. Conservative estimates suggest a global annual productivity loss between $3 billion and $6 billion for people with visual impairment, as a result of blinding diseases like trachoma. Another study of eight countries in Southern Africa estimated the total annual economic loss due to blindness to be more than $2.6 billion.

The chart below shows the economic impact of cataract surgery on patients in Kenya, Bangladesh and the Philippines.

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<tr>
<th>USD per Person per Month</th>
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<td>Cataract cases</td>
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Change in per capita expenditure between baseline and follow-up (one year later) in operated cases and controls in Kenya, Bangladesh and the Philippines.

* Cataract cases were offered surgery after baseline measurement

Failure to end avoidable blindness and visual impairment will limit our ability to achieve several of the Millennium Development Goals, including:

**MDG 1:** Eradicating extreme hunger and poverty – given that poverty is both a cause and consequence of blindness.

**MDG 2:** Achieving universal primary education – given that children, especially girls, with visual impairments are less likely to attend or succeed in school. A child’s role in caring for a blind adult can also impact school attendance.

**MDG 4:** Reducing child mortality – given that poor neonatal care can lead to blindness and child mortality rates are significantly higher among children who are blind.

**MDG 5:** Improving maternal health. Women with disabilities, including those who are blind, often experience reduced access to sexual and reproductive health and maternal health services, which can in turn lead to blindness in children.

**MDG 6:** Combating HIV, malaria and other diseases – given that people with disabilities, including blindness, have equal or increased risk of exposure to HIV infection, yet have less access to HIV health services.
Will you be part of the campaign to end avoidable blindness by 2020?

Right now a new Action Plan is being developed by WHO to set out the work needed to eliminate avoidable blindness by 2020.

The Action Plan needs engagement and input from Member States and non-government organisations across the globe.

All member states are encouraged to participate in the development of the Action Plan and to intensify their efforts to achieve the goal of eliminating avoidable blindness.
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