

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3023/03
by Anders Wijkman (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Combating meningitis in Africa

Meningitis epidemics frequently occur in Africa, killing and permanently disabling thousands of people. The emergence of a new strain of the meningitis bacteria – W135 – has rendered the traditionally used vaccine insufficient, if not useless. In record time, a public-private partnership, under the leadership of WHO, has been able to produce a vaccine against the new strain. In order to ensure an effective response in the case of a likely outbreak in parts of Africa early in 2004, a stock of several million doses of the new vaccine will be needed. The estimated cost for an effective preparedness programme is estimated at EUR 8.5 million. Most of that money has to be spent immediately and cannot wait for an epidemic to occur.

What will be the role of the EU in the efforts to prevent a serious meningitis epidemic in the so-called meningitis belt countries in the short term?