

## **Operation Blessing International Expands Efforts To Fight Zika In El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru And Haiti**

### **Tiny Mosquito-Eating Fish Are Part Of Efforts To Eradicate**

VIRGINIA BEACH, VA (February 12, 2016) – The global humanitarian organization, Operation Blessing International has ramped up its fight against the Zika virus in Central America and the Caribbean through efforts including the distribution of bed nets to pregnant women, pre-natal care, educating the public about how to avoid getting infected, fumigation of homes, as well as the use of tiny fish to eat mosquito larvae in standing water in and around homes and villages.

Operation Blessing first announced initial Zika efforts last month in El Salvador and Haiti, and has since added Peru, Guatemala and Honduras.

In El Salvador, Operation Blessing has partnered with a facility specializing in Sambo Fish, which live in the waters around El Salvador and eat mosquito larvae. The fish are caught in the wild and transferred to the facility, where Operation Blessing is providing food and tools to help keep them. The charity will also assist with distributing the fish into standing water in and around homes and villages in the weeks to come. (Video of the fish rearing facility: <http://www.ob.org/sambo-fish-and-how-they-can-stop-zika/>)

Operation Blessing leaders are also working with the El Salvador government to identify other varieties of mosquito-eating fish in the country that can be easily propagated in massive numbers in local hatcheries and distributed nationwide.

Operation Blessing has used mosquito-eating fish to great success in post-Katrina New Orleans, where the city credited the charity for helping to avert an outbreak of the deadly West Nile virus and St. Louis encephalitis after Operation Blessing volunteers stocked the fish into more than 5,500 abandoned swimming pools following the hurricane.

“All around the world, communities with mosquito-borne diseases have long used tiny fish to help eradicate or slow the spread of mosquitoes,” said Bill Horan, president of Operation Blessing. “By using fish species already in each country, there no risk to the ecosystem of introducing an invasive species: the fish are already there. We are working with local governments and community leaders, offering our expertise and willingness to raise and distribute massive numbers of fish in areas where they can have the greatest impact on reducing the mosquito population. We are excited about this project, as these little fish have proven themselves time and again.”

Operation Blessing has also purchased 650,000 doses of acetaminophen that are being shipped to El Salvador, and has secured a donation of 8,870 long lasting insecticide treated nets from Japan that will be distributed to pregnant women. In addition, Operation Blessing has purchased four portable ultra-sound machines that will be sent to rural health clinics for pre-natal care.

Further, Operation Blessing is partnering with the Mayo Clinic’s Program for Underserved Global Health (PUGH) to create a public service announcement that will educate the public about the Zika virus: who is considered high risk and how to avoid getting infected. The PSA will air on local media in El Salvador.

In Honduras, where the Ministry of Health has reported 4473 cases of Zika, Operation Blessing will offer prevention training to hundreds of pregnant women and children. The charity helped to train its 37 Honduran community health workers last week on the life cycle of the mosquito and how it transmits Zika, Chikungunya and Dengue, as well as identifying the symptoms of Zika. The workers are currently going from house to house, to schools and churches, distributing bed nets, insect repellent and teaching people how to decrease the risk of mosquito breeding by eliminating standing water in and around their homes.

In Guatemala, Operation Blessing has partnered with the Ministry of Health to assist with fumigation efforts around homes in Izabal. The organization will also purchase and distribute bed nets and insect repellent to pregnant women in the coming week.

In Haiti, the charity has distributed insect repellent to a village at Lac Azuei and the Higher Ground communities. Later this week, Operation Blessing will pick up 800 bed nets from the Dominican Republic and will begin distributing them in Haiti. Team leaders will provide community training to health workers and are currently writing training curriculum in Haitian Creole for local health workers. Operation Blessing has also partnered with two maternity organizations with networks in other parts of Haiti: Midwives for Haiti (Central Plateau) and Mamababy Haiti (Cap Haitien) to distribute bed nets, repellent and educational materials.

Although there are no cases of Zika in Peru yet, the Operation Blessing team is already training community health workers in Iquitos on how to identify the mosquito, how the disease is transmitted, symptoms, and how to prevent infection. They will soon distribute nets to pregnant women and distribute fliers around the area for education.

For more information please visit: [www.ob.org](http://www.ob.org)

#### **ABOUT OPERATION BLESSING INTERNATIONAL:**

Operation Blessing International (OBI) is one of the largest charities in America, providing strategic disaster relief, medical aid, hunger relief, clean water and community development in 37 countries around the world on an ongoing basis. In 2015, OBI was awarded Charity Navigator's coveted 4-star rating for sound fiscal management marking 8 years the charity has received this prestigious ranking. Forbes also ranks OBI as one of its "100 Largest Charities" with an efficiency rating of 99%. Founded in 1978, Operation Blessing International has touched the lives of more than 292 million people in more than 105 countries and 50 states, providing goods and services valued at over \$4.2 billion.

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