

## Battle Against Crippling Parasitic Disease Nearly won, Says Carter

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by Sarah Boseley

# Battle against crippling parasitic disease nearly won, says Carter

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The world is tantalisingly close to eradicating guinea worm disease, which would make it only the second disease of humans to be wiped from the planet, according to the former US president Jimmy Carter.

Speaking in London alongside World Health Organisation director general Dr Margaret Chan, Carter, who has led the fight against the disease, said that about £60m more was needed to finish the job.

Since the Carter Centre took up the cause in 1986, almost every country had eradicated the crippling and painful disease, said the former president. "It is likely by the end of this year we will have guinea worm in only one country - the newest one on Earth - South Sudan," he said.

In 1995 Carter personally negotiated a six-month ceasefire between northern and southern Sudan in a successful attempt to reach remote villages where guinea worm larvae infest drinking water, causing immense suffering to some of the poorest men, women and children on Earth.

Carter eventually helped negotiate

peace and his centre monitored the national elections in 2010 and the referendum on separation this year.

Since 1986, 3.5m cases of guinea worm disease in 21 countries have been reduced by 99.9%. Now there are fewer than 1,000 a year. In 1979, while Carter was president, the eradication of smallpox was declared. That cost £195m and was achieved through mass vaccination.

Guinea worm eradication, a generation later, has so far cost £250m and is close to being achieved without recourse to vaccination or treatments, because they do not exist.

The disease is being prevented through the drilling of wells for uncontaminated water and education of those who live in remote rural villages. People have been taught to filter their drinking water through a small pipe, cheaply made and distributed, which removes the guinea worm larvae.

Stephen O'Brien, international development minister, pledged yesterday that the UK government would provide up to one-third of the funding needed for the campaign against the disease, putting in £1 for every £2 from elsewhere.