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# Gates pledges RM34 billion for vaccines

**DAVOS (Switzerland):** Microsoft chairman Bill Gates, the world's richest man, on Friday promised US\$10 billion (RM34 billion) to develop "miracle" vaccines for the world's poorest nations.

Bill announced at the World Economic Forum that the money will come over the next decade from the foundation he runs with his wife Melinda, and that vaccines will become the charity's top priority.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has now committed more than US\$25 billion to various health projects, especially targeting AIDS and polio and other diseases that hit poor countries.

"We must make this the decade of vaccines," Bill said here. "Vaccines already save and improve millions of

lives in developing countries.

"Innovation will make it possible to save more children than ever before."

Increased vaccination could save more than eight million children by 2020, he added, but called on governments and the private sector to do more.

"Increased investment in vaccines by governments and the private sector could help developing countries dramatically reduce child mortality by the end of the decade," Bill said in a statement.

Melinda added: "Vaccines are a miracle — with just a few doses, they can prevent deadly diseases for a lifetime.

"We've made vaccines our number-one priority at the Gates Foundation because we've seen first hand their incredible impact on children's lives."

United Nations agencies and campaign groups welcomed Bills stunning announcement.

"The Gates Foundation's commitment to vaccines is unprecedented, but

needs to be matched by unprecedented action," said World Health Organisation director-general Margaret Chan.

"It's absolutely crucial that both governments and the private sector step up efforts to provide life-saving vaccines to children who need them most."

One, the activist group set up by rock singer Bono to fight poverty and preventable disease, said Bill's money "is a testament to their belief in catalysing transformative change".

But it also said that western governments and institutions must "accelerate their own investments in effective organisations."

Bill began working full time at the foundation after stepping down from heading up Microsoft business operations in July 2008. — AFP



Bill and Melinda Gates at a press conference at the 40th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Friday. — AP picture