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Cutting the odds of babies with HIV

WITHIN five years the world could shield all newborns from HIV, while making strides in reducing deaths from malaria and tuberculosis, the Global Fund to fight the three diseases said.

But those gains depend on the world continuing to ramp up health spending to maintain the current rate of progress, the Global Fund said in its annual report.

"A world where no children are born with HIV is truly possible by 2015," said Michel Kazatchkine, head of the Global Fund, launching the group's annual report.

"It is also possible now to imagine a world with no more malaria deaths, since already an increasing number of countries have been reporting a reduction in malaria deaths of more than 50 per cent over the past

couple of years," he said.

"No other area of development has seen such a direct and rapid correlation between donor investments and live-saving impact as these investments in fighting AIDS, TB and malaria."

Programmes supported by the Global Fund have provided anti-retroviral drugs to 790,000 pregnant women with HIV, which dramatically reduces the chances of their babies being born with the virus.

That represents about 45 per cent of the women who need such treatments, the Fund said, adding that reaching the goal of 100 per cent depends on ongoing donor commitments.

Kazatchkine said in Africa more than 400,000 babies were born with HIV last year, compared to four in France, saying that moth-

er to child transmission could virtually be eliminated with effective drug regimens.

UNAIDS chief Michel Sidibe said a few years ago in Africa, less than 50,000 people were on anti-retroviral treatment, but currently 3.5 million people were on treatment.

Despite progress on the prevention and treatment of HIV, the fight against the disease was not over, he said.

"There are 7,400 new infections every day, and we have more than 5,000 people dying everyday with HIV and every time we put two people on treatment we have five new infections," said Sidibe.

Sidibe said underfunding of the organisation would result in people stopping their treatment, resulting in more deaths.