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PRESS RELEASE

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We're winning the fight against blindness

Berkeley, CA – For the first time in history, the number of people suffering from blindness is decreasing according to new figures released by the World Health Organization (WHO).

According to new WHO estimates:

- 39 million are blind (down from 45 million in 2000)
- 246 million have significant visual impairment (down from 314 million in 2000)

Prior to this historic moment, the number of blind people always increased. Winning the battle against blindness therefore has meant building global eye care capacity to exceed population growth.

[Seva Foundation](#) and our sister organization [Seva Canada](#), along with over 100 international and local eye care organizations participating in [VISION 2020](#), have contributed in great part to this success story.

For over 30 years, Seva's pioneering, results-driven, and comprehensive approach — fostering dynamic partnerships, integrating technology and training, and serving as a multiplier for eye care — has helped serve the world's most vulnerable populations. In the past year alone, Seva's partners performed over 500,000 eye surgeries and screened over three million people in some of the poorest regions on earth.

Jack Blanks, Executive Director of Berkeley-based Seva Foundation says, "The main driver for meeting the challenge of blindness reduction comes from countries like India where eye programs have produced innovative eye care delivery models. High-quality and efficient delivery models have not only increased capacity ten fold, they have become models for redefining eye care delivery in industrialized countries including the USA and Canada."

"The battle is being won through the growth of eye care programs in low-income countries. While expanded services are an achievement, equitable service remains a challenge," says Penny Lyons, Executive Director of Seva Canada. "We care that two out of every three people who are blind are female, most of whom are older and live in extreme poverty."

[International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness](#) CEO, Peter Ackland said, "These figures are really encouraging as for the first time we have a clear indication of the downward trend in the absolute number of visually impaired people in the world. Undoubtedly much of this success is attributable to the efforts of the many governments and international agencies involved in the VISION 2020: The Right to Sight global initiative."

The WHO study also found that the three greatest causes of blindness remain cataract, glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration. A further 246 million people are said to be suffering from low vision, with uncorrected refractive error (the need for a pair of glasses) as the greatest contributor to this number.

"Seva's dream is a world in which no one is needlessly blind or visually impaired," says Lyons. "Eighty percent of the 285 million people in the world who are visually impaired could be cured, treated or have their blindness prevented. That's 228 million people who could see if they had access to care. Seva shows what a small group of committed people can do. We and the other members of VISION 2020 must re-double our efforts to make this vision a reality."

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