

The push to make TB meds accessible

By **SUNREPORTER**

DOCTORS Without Borders (MSF) and the Stop TB Partnership have given governments a deadline to dramatically increase access to testing and treatment ahead of the first global ministerial conference on ending TB, in Moscow.

TB remains the world's top infectious killer disease – 1,7 million deaths worldwide last year.

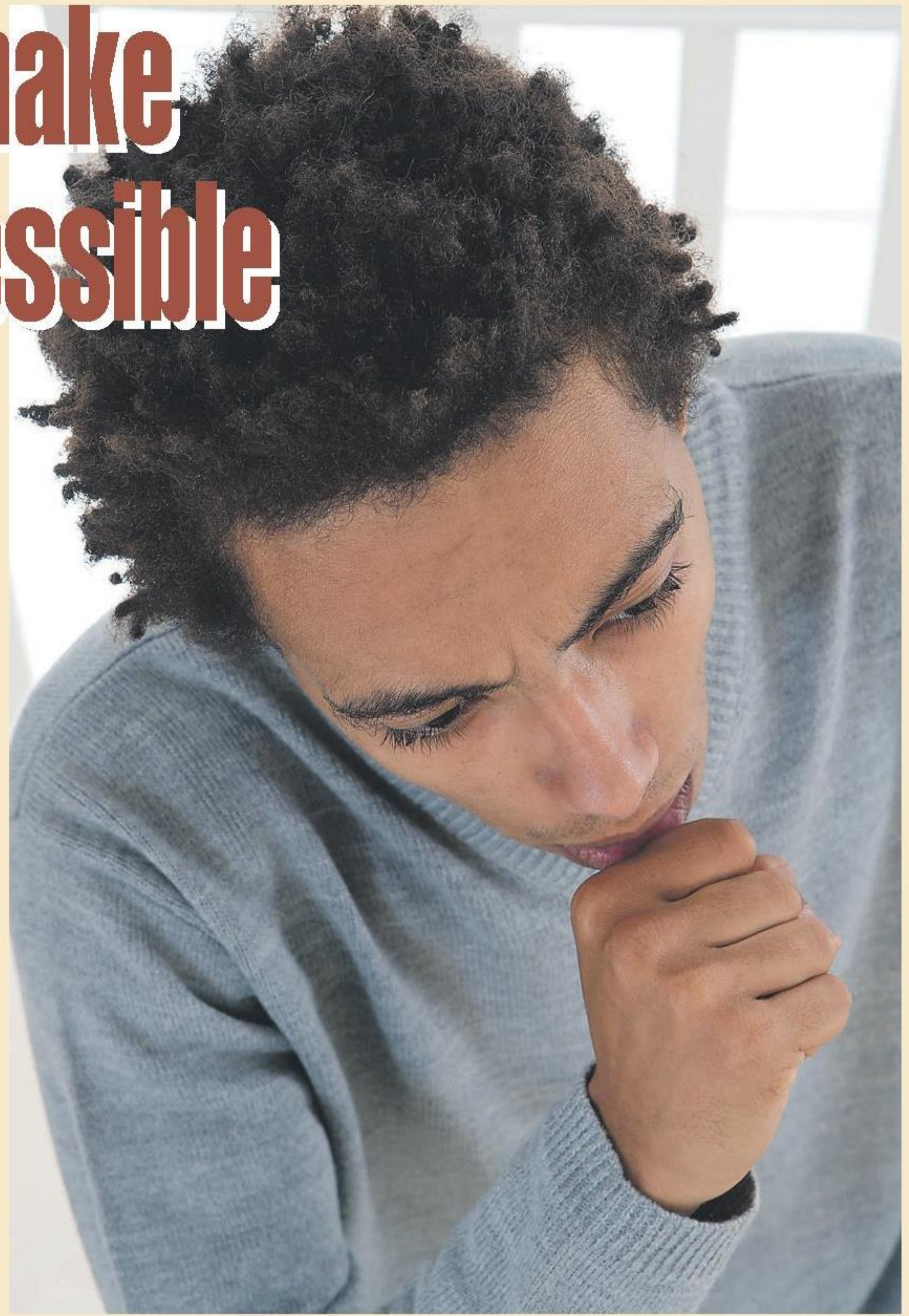
Notably, South Africa faces one of the highest TB burdens in the world – around 438 000 new cases last year alone. Of that number, at least 20 000 are infected with a drug-resistant TB or DR-TB, which means that the disease is immune to regular meds.

At the conference, Mariam Avanesova, who was treated for multi-drug-resistant (MDR) TB, in Armenia, between 2010 to 2012, will hand over a petition to the WHO director-general, Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus.

The #StepUpforTB petition is an urgent call for health ministers in key TB-affected countries to get their TB policies and practices in line with international standards, as defined by WHO, including testing and treatment of TB and its drug-resistant forms.

Initiated by MSF and the Stop TB partnership, the petition has been signed by more than 30 000 people from 120 countries around the world who are united with people affected by TB.

Patients' stories from MSF's TB Chechnya treatment programme in the Russian Federation shows how important it is to improve people's access to TB diagnosis and treatment. The introduction of newer TB drugs, such as bedaquiline and delamanid, represents a potential lifeline for people affected with



TB is a global problem which is why there's a global demand for newer, better drugs.

the most resistant forms of TB.

One patient, named Tamerlan was diagnosed with XDR-TB in 2015 and he spoke about his struggles with meds: "It's important that new, effective drugs are developed, and that the treatment course is shorter with fewer pills.

"This new treatment I've been taking for the last two years is much easier to tolerate than what I was given before."

Sinethemba Kuse, an MSF patient cured of XDR-TB, here in South Africa, was the first teen in Khayelitsha to be given delamanid.

Sinethemba said: "Government needs to give a lot of people this tablet because there are many who don't get the chance for decent medicine, and they suffer miserably and then die.

"I suggest the government buys this tablet so everyone gets a second chance after TB."