

# THE UNION LATIN AMERICA REGION IN 2018



CREDIT: The Union

## AWARD-WINNING UNION MEMBER JULIAN VILLALBA HIGHLIGHTS THE PLIGHT OF INDIGENOUS VENEZUELAN

Julian Villalba takes a swab from a child  
of the Warao tribe in Venezuela.

Winner of the 2014 Union's Young Innovator Prize, Julian Villalba was a 22-year-old medical student when he went to serve the Warao tribe who inhabit the Orinoco Delta, an area of dense jungle around one of Latin America's largest rivers.

He says: *"It quickly became apparent that tuberculosis (TB) was rife in these communities. Because prevalence was so low in Venezuela generally, I had only seen a couple of cases during my studies. But in this isolated area the disease was widespread — rates of childhood TB were astonishing. The shocking reality was that TB there wasn't being controlled in these communities at all. There were no children in treatment, and no preventive therapy. This became my priority."*

After Villalba finished his medical training he returned to the Orinoco Delta for another eighteen months as a primary care physician. When he returned he found many in these communities had immune-suppressant illnesses. It was HIV.

He designed an integrated programme to deal with TB and HIV in the region, which he proposed to the Ministry of Health and was initially encouraged by their response. But with national elections looming, the story was quietly buried. So he flagged the issue with WHO and PAHO.

Villalba's experiences in Venezuela are unfortunately just one example around the world where individuals are not yet able to get the access to diagnosis, treatment and care that is urgently needed to save lives and beat the twin epidemics of TB and HIV. Highlighting work like Villalba's is an important aspect of The Union's work.

# FROM EVIDENCE TO PUBLIC HEALTH ACTION

For nearly 100 years The Union has drawn together the best scientific evidence and expertise to address the most pressing public health challenges affecting people living in poverty around the world. Know. Share. Act.

## KNOW

- The 11<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Latin American Thorax Association (ALAT, for its initials in Spanish), held in Mexico City, discussed regional approaches to lung health issues of the greatest urgency in Latin America. At the congress, The Union's Executive Director, José Luis Castro, addressed delegates via video message reiterating The Union's commitment to Latin America and encouraging delegates to rally together in the lead-up to the United Nations High-Level Meetings on TB and non-communicable diseases.
- The Union provided technical assistance and training to a number of countries across the region including training nearly 100 professionals in Brazil and Peru on Project Management, and post-graduates in Mexico attended a course on multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB).
- The Union continued its training in TB-HIV healthcare in Ecuador with 35 professionals learning about the management of both diseases. The training was supported by scientific society, 'Sociedad Ecuatoriana de Infectología'.

## SHARE

- The Union's TB and Mental Health Working Group shared a video, 'Learning from the field: The mental health management of MDR-TB in Peru', featuring in-depth interviews from a psychiatrist, a nurse, and a person cured of MDR-TB, describing their experience and perspectives of mental health care during MDR-TB treatment.
- A total of 17 participants from 10 countries attended the *Epidemiología y Control de la Tuberculosis* course held in Lima, Peru.
- Alberto Piubello, coordinator of MDR-TB activities at The Union, taught aspects of an international course for programmatic management of MDR-TB in Antigua, co-organised by Action Damien and the National TB Programme of Guatemala, which was attended by 21 professionals.
- The Union has reaffirmed its commitment to Latin America by announcing that it will hold its Conference of The Union Latin America Region in conjunction with ALAT's Annual Congress, to be held in Panama in July 2019. Both Dr. Gustavo Zabert, ALAT President, and José Luis Castro, Executive Director of The Union, expressed their dedication to work closely for the Congress.

## ACT

- The Union provided legal advice to Brazil to secure ratification of the World Health Organization's Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, which came into effect in September 2018. The Union also provided legal, technical and financial assistance to help uphold Brazil's Supreme Court ban on flavours and additives in tobacco products.
- In Chile, the Chamber of Deputies' Health Committee voted in favour of a comprehensive reform to the General Law for Tobacco Control. The Union contributed financial, technical and legal support to develop and promote the bill.
- The government of El Salvador launched a two-year collaboration with The Union to step up its implementation of the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which aims to expedite reductions in tobacco use by developing a national tobacco control policy.
- Run by The Union and partners, the '10<sup>th</sup> Workshop on Law and Tobacco Control for Latin America' took place in Washington DC to inform and assist development of legislation with health protection and promotion as the top priority.

