When I was asked to become the patroness of KNCV Tuberculosis Foundation a few years ago, I didn’t hesitate to answer ‘Yes’, because I am especially motivated to help in the fight against tuberculosis.

That is because tuberculosis is anything but a ‘forgotten’ disease; in 2015 it poses an all-too-real threat: a devastating infectious disease, the second-most deadly infectious disease in the world, which costs the lives of more than 4,000 people every day. Each year, nine million people fall ill with tuberculosis and one third of them are unable to receive adequate treatment.

It is therefore vital that we understand that, and that we inform as many people as possible that we must do everything we can to eliminate the disease.

That is a realistic goal, if we have the desire and are willing to devote the necessary financial resources. We will have to combine our efforts in order to reduce the suffering of the most vulnerable groups of people in the most affected countries such as India, Nigeria and Indonesia, but also to protect the many nurses and health workers who face the ever-present risk of becoming infected as they do their jobs. If the disease is detected in time and the patients receive proper treatment, then the disease is curable.

KNCV has been active in the fight against tuberculosis for more than 110 years, and strives to eventually eliminate the disease from the world. KNCV is an important center of expertise and pioneer in the global fight against tuberculosis. With the TB CARE I program, which was led by KNCV and financed by USAID, more than four million lives have been saved over the past five years. Over the next five years, the organization will continue to work towards a structured, sustainable approach in the most affected countries. An international approach in line with the World Health Organization’s strategy is crucial. But we in the Netherlands must also remain vigilant to ensure that TB does not regain a foothold here as well. Even here, drug-resistant variants of TB pose a threat to public health.

The strategy for the next few years is based on: ensuring that everyone infected with TB is identified, diagnosed and treated; gathering and sharing knowledge of the most effective treatment methods; and reinforcing the local infrastructure in cooperation with governments, social partners and private parties.

I am proud of our KNCV, which in drawing up and implementing this Strategic Plan 2015-2020 will make an important contribution to ‘a world without tuberculosis’.