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Tata Trusts and Gilead Sciences, Inc. signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) under the presence of Ratan Tata, Honorable Chairman, Tata Trusts to explore collaborating within India on an initiative to address the burden of viral hepatitis in the country. This effort takes place in the context of an expanding focus on the public health challenges posed by serious diseases, including viral hepatitis, representing significant unmet medical needs in India.

Under the MoU, Tata Trusts and Gilead will form a Joint Program Committee to implement activities pertaining to (1) prevention, awareness and education, (2) testing and treatment, and (3) health systems strengthening activities in the field of viral hepatitis in India. Linkages with state governments, non-governmental organizations and public health agencies will be established to promote the cause.

Hepatitis viruses B (HBV) and C (HCV) pose a serious threat of becoming a "silent epidemic" in India. HBV is the second most common cause of acute viral hepatitis in India, with a prevalence of approximately 4% - more than 40 million individuals are estimated to carry the virus. The prevalence of HCV infection in India is approximately 1%. Most infected persons are unaware of their chronic carrier status. Left untreated, viral hepatitis can lead to life-threatening liver cirrhosis (or scarring), liver failure and liver cancer. The burden that the diseases place on society through the loss of a productive workforce and on the healthcare system is acute.

Speaking on the occasion, R Venkataramanan, Managing Trustee, Tata Trusts, said, "As a part of our overall health strategy aimed at addressing communicable diseases in India, we look forward to partnering with Gilead to create unique models to reduce the prevalence of viral hepatitis in the country."

Gregg Alton, Executive Vice President, Commercial and Access Operations Asia, Latin America and Africa, Corporate and Medical Affairs at Gilead, said, "We are very pleased to have the opportunity to partner with Tata Trusts, an organization that shares our goal of improving people's health and quality of life. Viral hepatitis presents a complex public health challenge in

India, and by working in partnership and pooling our expertise, we hope to identify sustainable initiatives that can have a lasting impact on the burden of disease."