

Press release

UNAIDS acknowledges good progress on AIDS in China and urges continued commitment and community mobilisation

Beijing, China, 17 June 2007 – The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) today acknowledged that good progress has been made in China's response to AIDS, presenting special awards to China's Vice Minister of Health, Dr Wang Longde and Professor Zhang Beichuan from Qingdao University, for their leadership on AIDS issues.

At an award ceremony held in the Chinese capital, Beijing, UNAIDS Executive Director Peter Piot congratulated Dr Longde and Professor Zhang for their dedication and commitment to helping China get ahead of its AIDS epidemic and establish a multi-sectoral response.

"As I visit countries around the world, I witness time and again that strong and committed leadership brings progress in the AIDS response. Leaders are distinguished by their action, innovation and vision; their personal example and engagement of others; and, their perseverance in the face of obstacles and challenges," he said.

"Today I am honored to present awards to two pioneers, who have been at the forefront of the AIDS response in the country and who have encouraged others to follow," he added.

China's Vice Minister of Health responsible for AIDS since 2004, Dr Wang Longde has been instrumental in making a response to AIDS a priority for China. He has placed particular emphasis on ensuring a multi-sectoral approach to AIDS and encouraging a range of partners to join China's response.

Professor Zhang Beichuan from Qingdao University has undertaken ground-breaking work in raising HIV awareness among men who have sex with men, breaking down stigma and discrimination against people at high risk of HIV infection and developing focused HIV prevention programmes.

"This kind of enlightened leadership on AIDS is critical to getting ahead of the epidemic and keeping the challenges AIDS presents high in the minds of policy makers and the general public," said Dr Piot. "As well as governments, non-governmental organizations and people living with HIV are essential partners in an effective response to AIDS," he said.

UNAIDS country mission

The UNAIDS award ceremony took place as part of a week-long country visit to China by UNAIDS Executive Director, to learn more about how the country is intensifying and moving its response to AIDS forward. The mission travelled through Henan, one of the provinces most affected by AIDS – visiting Shangcai county and the provincial capital Zhengzhou – where Dr Piot met with people living with HIV who became infected through blood trade in the 1990s, AIDS orphans, NGOs and representatives of civil society as well as government officials and health professionals.

Following the Henan mission, Dr Piot travelled on to the Chinese capital Beijing. Over the next days he will meet with Chinese government officials and hold talks with Chinese AIDS experts, key opinion makers as well as people living with HIV.

During the week long trip, UNAIDS Executive Director is highlighting a number of key issues such as the need for continued leadership on AIDS, the need for focused HIV prevention programmes to reach people most at risk of HIV and the continued need to reduce AIDS-related stigma and discrimination in China.

“I am confident that China can continue scaling up its response to AIDS, focusing programmes to reach the people that need them most, involving people living with HIV and “making the money work” – ensuring the funding available for AIDS is used most effectively and efficiently. It is still early to tell, but China might just be turning the corner on AIDS”, said Dr Piot.

UNAIDS has been supporting efforts to curb the AIDS epidemic in China for over ten years. As part of the mission, Dr Piot will also discuss United Nations continued support to China and promote the new ‘UN Joint Programme on AIDS’ that has been developed in the country. The new programme includes a clear division of labour between UN agencies working on AIDS and aims at ensuring that the United Nations ‘delivers as one’ on AIDS.

“As China’s response develops, so does the UN response within the country. Increased coordination will enable us all to be more effective. We look forward to supporting China in its response to AIDS and working together with China in expanding the global response to AIDS, particularly in Africa”, UNAIDS Executive Director said.

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UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations to respond to AIDS. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. Coherent action on AIDS by the UN system is coordinated in countries through the UN theme groups, and the joint programmes on AIDS. Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. For more information please visit the UNAIDS web site at www.unaids.org and www.unaids.org.cn.