

Press release

Asia Pacific region is actively moving on the road towards universal access to HIV prevention and treatment

The second regional consultation on scaling up towards universal access takes place in Pattaya, Thailand (14-16 February 2006).

Bangkok - 10 February 2006. Representatives from 20 countries across Asia and the Pacific will meet in Thailand this week to map out a strategy for scaling up HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services and moving towards universal access to treatment to all those who need it.

The Thai Ministry of Public Health will host the Pattaya meeting, entitled “Asia and Pacific Regional Consultation on Scaling up Towards Universal Access to HIV Prevention, Treatment, Care and Support.” from 14-16 February 2006.

The meeting is one of seven regional consultations being held globally, and will bring together more than 100 government and leaders from non governmental, community based and faith based organizations from across the region.

20% of the 40 million people living with HIV and AIDS globally are found in the Asia Pacific region. AIDS has claimed more than half a million lives and more than one million people became newly infected in this region last year only.

“We will make sure that the universal access process makes a difference – both in advocacy and in practical actions to help countries overcome obstacles to scaling up,” said Michel Sidibe, UNAIDS Director of Country and Regional Support and Co-chair of the Global Steering Committee on scaling towards universal access.

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/ AIDS (UNAIDS) has been asked by the United Nations General Assembly in a resolution adopted on 23 December 2005 to assist in facilitating an inclusive effort driven by the countries themselves with the aim of coming as close as possible to the goal of universal access to treatment by 2010 for all those who need it, including through increased resources, and working towards the elimination of stigma and discrimination, enhanced access to affordable medicines and the reduction of vulnerability of persons affected by HIV and AIDS and other health issues.

As of today, more than 10 countries in the Asia Pacific region have held national consultations aiming at identifying specific obstacles to scaling up towards universal access and the concrete solutions needed to overcome them. Worldwide, more than 40 countries have held national consultations and more than a 100 are engaged in the process. The Asia Pacific consultation is the second regional event to take place.

UNAIDS Asia Pacific Regional Director, Dr Prasada Rao stressed that more vigilant efforts and resources are needed for HIV prevention programmes for those who remain most likely to be exposed to HIV: “We cannot continue to allow social stigma to drive certain

communities further underground and away from the reach of comprehensive AIDS services they so urgently need.”

“UNAIDS supports all prevention outreach programs which can encourage marginalized groups to access public health services, while respecting their dignity and human rights,” said Dr. Rao.

At the heart of many of Asia’s epidemics lies the interplay between injecting drug use and unprotected sex, much of it commercial.

Contact details

In Bangkok: Jeanne Hallacy, tel. +666 003 2316 and David Bridger, tel. +661 816 7953

In Geneva: Yasmine Topor, tel. +41.22.791.35.01