

Press release

Global Fund and UNAIDS Call for Rapid Scaleup of Efforts to Combat AIDS

Moscow, 15 May 2006 – With 270,000 people newly infected with HIV in 2005 alone, the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) region faces the world's most rapidly expanding AIDS epidemic. An estimated 1.6 million people are living with the disease across the region, and in several countries the epidemic shows signs of crossing from groups most at risk into the general population.

The first regional AIDS conference in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, which opens today in Moscow, underscores the growing momentum to scale up the AIDS response. A significant increase in both financial resources and political commitment over the past two years suggest that the pieces are falling into place for regional and international partners to effectively tackle the epidemic.

National health spending in many countries of the region is beginning to expand. Domestic spending on AIDS in Russia is slated to increase by 20 times in 2006 to over US\$100 million. In 2005, Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin established HIV prevention as a national priority.

"AIDS is one of the greatest challenges facing Eastern Europe and Central Asia today," said Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS, during his keynote address at the Conference. "Fear and stigma are truly the best friends of HIV. To get ahead of the epidemic, stigma and discrimination must be tackled head-on, and HIV prevention and treatment services must be urgently scaled up."

As funding for AIDS increases, UNAIDS' main focus is to make the money work, and assist countries in scaling up HIV prevention, treatment, care and support programmes. An effective AIDS response must include strong political leadership, partnerships between governments, people living with HIV and civil society, and sustained funding.

"In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, we have the opportunity to stem the growth of AIDS before it becomes a catastrophe," said Dr. Richard Feachem, Executive Director of the Global Fund at a joint press conference held on the opening day of the EEAC conference. "The Global Fund is investing heavily to assist the region in facing this challenge, and is fully committed to rapid scale up of programs in the region."

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Global Fund is now the largest external donor for efforts to prevent and treat HIV and tuberculosis, having already committed more than US\$ 700 million in the region. A significant investment of up to US\$ 300 million is being made in Russia, which has increased its domestic spending on HIV in parallel.

While Global Fund-financed programs in Eastern Europe and Central Asia are still young – on average just 19 months since the start of their grants – by the end of 2005, they had reached more than 2.1 million people with AIDS prevention activities and provided HIV testing and counseling for more than 700,000 people – an essential measure for both preventing and treating the disease. In addition, these programs had brought 3,200 people onto antiretroviral treatment regimens and delivered care and support to 17,000 orphans and other vulnerable children. The Global Fund is also investing heavily into TB programs in the region with more than 23,000 people reached to date through Directly Observed Treatment Short course (DOTS) – the international standard for TB control.

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