



Press release

AIDS LEADERS HIGHLIGHT PARTNERSHIP IN CHINA'S AIDS RESPONSE

Beijing / Yunnan, China, 8 June 2005 – The United States and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) today congratulated China on its increased efforts to strengthen its response to AIDS and called for further commitments at all levels and through all sectors, as they commence a three-day mission to the south western province of Yunnan.

UNAIDS Executive Director Dr Peter Piot and U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator Ambassador Randall Tobias are travelling together in a joint mission to gain a shared perspective of the progress and challenges facing China in its AIDS response.

"Chinese leadership at the highest levels has made AIDS a priority issue - these commitments must be made real," said Dr Piot. "On this trip we are learning how progress is being made on the ground at the provincial level. We're encouraged by what we see but a truly exceptional response is needed to get ahead of the epidemic."

The U.S. government has committed over US\$ 35 million over five years for HIV/AIDS-related activities in China. Since 2003 the U.S. funding of HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment services has increased by 82%.

"The United States will continue to support China's efforts in our shared fight against AIDS," said Ambassador Tobias. "This visit and the opportunity I've had to meet with Chinese officials helps to ensure U.S. support is consistent with China's HIV/AIDS goals and objectives."

The joint mission will travel through Yunnan - visiting the capital Kunming and Geiju city. The mission will meet with representatives of provincial government and city leaders and will include visits to various key sites that are focused on prevention among high risk groups.

According to Chinese government estimates, 840,000 people were living with HIV in China at the end of 2003. HIV prevalence is particularly high among certain groups in some areas of Yunnan, Xinjiang, Guangxi and Henan.

During the three-day trip, the leaders will discuss key issues such as reducing stigma and discrimination, raising HIV and AIDS awareness and improving coordination and monitoring and evaluation for a strengthened AIDS response. HIV testing and counselling will also be underlined as paramount among the interventions which play a pivotal role both in treatment and in prevention.

UNAIDS and the U.S. Government agree that HIV testing and counselling should be voluntary and confidential, ideally free of charge, and to the greatest extent possible linked to easily available and high quality treatment and care.

Prior to his arrival in Yunnan, Ambassador Tobias visited Beijing. Ambassador Tobias and Ambassador Randt, the U.S. Ambassador to China, visited You'an Hospital together and also opened the first U.S. government conference on HIV/AIDS in China. This conference reflects the United States' increased commitment to working with China on HIV/AIDS treatment, care and prevention. Ambassador Tobias visited U.S.-supported programs that focus on HIV/AIDS surveillance, case identification, prevention and research. Ambassador Tobias was publicly tested for HIV/AIDS with Pu Chunxin, the Chinese actor and AIDS Ambassador. He also met with the China State Council Working Group on AIDS to discuss ways to deepen and enhance the United States' partnership with China on HIV/AIDS.

Following the Yunnan mission, Dr Piot will also visit the Chinese capital Beijing where he will meet with the Chinese leadership and government officials, reporting back on reflections of his visit and discussing key considerations for a strengthened AIDS response in China. Dr Piot will address students and faculty of the Central Party School – the first time a non-Chinese national has been invited to deliver a speech on AIDS. He will also meet key opinion makers, Chinese AIDS experts as well as people living with HIV, underlining the importance of involving them in the response to AIDS.

UNAIDS has been supporting efforts to curb the AIDS epidemic in China for ten years. To honour progresses that have been made, Dr Piot will present awards to organizations and individuals – including a person living with HIV – for their contributions to the AIDS response in China.