



Press release

ASIAN AIDS RESPONSE AT RISK UNLESS COORDINATION IMPROVES, WARNS MAJOR AIDS CONFERENCE

Civil society powerful force to fight AIDS in countries

Kobe, Japan, 3 July 2005 – The response to AIDS in Asia will be in jeopardy unless everyone works more closely together to reverse the epidemic, according to a symposium held at Asia's leading AIDS conference today attended by representatives from donor governments, civil society, and the United Nations.

"The AIDS response is at a crossroads in Asia," said JVR Prasada Rao, the Director of Regional Support for Asia and Pacific of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), who was speaking at the 7th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific. "Unless more coordinated and harmonized action is taken by all players – including governments, civil society, the UN and donor communities – the Millennium Development Goals on HIV will not be achieved in many Asian countries," he said. The Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, were agreed by the world's governments at a global United Nations summit in 2000.

At present, lack of harmonization places the AIDS response at risk. For example, a key problem in Asia is the issue of coverage – the number of people who have access to AIDS programmes. In Indonesia, a country where most major donors have AIDS programmes or projects, prevention coverage is available to only 1% of men who have sex with men, 9% of injecting drug users and 22% of female sex workers. This scenario is common throughout the region. National AIDS programmes must scale up HIV care and prevention programmes that reach out to vulnerable groups.

A single national AIDS authority is one of the pillars of the 'Three Ones' principle, which calls for one national AIDS action framework, one national AIDS authority and one system for monitoring and evaluation in each country. "The Three Ones call for new ways of working. Donors need to move beyond doing their own thing and start doing the right thing," said Mr Jordan Ryan, UN Resident Coordinator in Viet Nam.

Much recent discussion in the AIDS world has centered around harmonization, or better coordination among the various actors in the response to avoid duplication and improve the way money is spent and programmes implemented at country level.

"Without well-coordinated efforts, government commitments and national capacity, most of the resources we have raised for our country might go unused," said Hong Son Hout, Chair of Cambodia's National AIDS Authority and Chair of the symposium, 'Three Ones in Action,' held at the ICAAP conference today. "We have a considerable pool of local technical resources upon which to draw in this region. We cannot allow these to be wasted," he added.

In March this year leaders from donor and developing country governments, civil society, UN agencies and other multilateral and international institutions met in London to review the reasons behind what many term an inadequate response to AIDS. Participants renewed

their commitment to stronger and more effective support to AIDS responses in countries and established a Global Task Team, which has handed down ten specific recommendations¹.

Total resources available for the Asia and Pacific region for AIDS amounted to US\$681 million in 2003. This is expected to more than double to US \$1.6 billion in 2007, but is far from the US\$5 billion needed to reverse the epidemic in the region, experts say.

A vital partner in the Three Ones and in strengthening the AIDS response at country level is civil society, whose participation is particularly critical to respond to the needs of the community. For example, of 16 countries surveyed in 2004 in the region, only seven had policies addressing injecting drug users, and only three have action plans to reach the most vulnerable groups.

“Overall, civil society’s involvement in the development of the Three Ones has been extremely limited,” said Dr Balwant Singh, Director of the India HIV/AIDS Alliance, a major Indian non-governmental organization (NGO). “Civil society has the responsibility to work more effectively together, and other actors need to learn how to work well with society.”

The NGO involvement must be genuine, however. “We need to ensure Three Ones has a human face at country level. And this means involving people living with and affected by AIDS, and forcefully tackling the problems of stigma and discrimination,” said Mr Ryan.

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¹ National mechanisms that drive implementation and provide a basis for the alignment of external support; Macroeconomic policies that support the response to AIDS; Alignment of external support to national strategies, policies, systems, cycles, and plans; Approaches to progressively shift from project to programme financing, and harmonization of programming, financing, and reporting; Closer UN coordination on AIDS at country level; UN system-Global Fund problem-solving mechanisms at global level; Clarification of the division of labour among multilateral institutions; Increased financing for technical support; Country assessments of the performance of multilateral institutions, international partners and national stakeholders; Strengthening of country monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and structures that facilitate oversight.