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BUSINESS INITIATES DIALOGUE WITH CHINESE GOVERNMENT AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS TO ADDRESS HIV/AIDS IN CHINA

The Final Workshop in a Series Being Convened by Harvard University, UNAIDS and World Economic Forum to Respond to the Threat of AIDS in China

Beijing, China, 5 November 2003 – Harvard University, the World Economic Forum and UNAIDS hosted today the first ever meeting of business, government and civil society in China discussing the potential role of partnerships to combat HIV/AIDS in China. Calling on all stakeholders to increase their efforts, the meeting highlighted the future economic impact of AIDS and its relevance to the business community. Chinese government representatives made it clear that business has a vital role in a comprehensive response to dealing with HIV/AIDS. Business leaders called on government to reaffirm publicly their commitment to support wider efforts - including by businesses– to raise awareness, increase prevention activities and introduce treatment and care.

Dr. Shen Jie, Director of the National Center for HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control in the People's Republic of China, emphasized that "AIDS has become a serious social and public health issue and requires immediate, strong actions from all sectors of society. Chinese leaders regard AIDS as a national strategic issue that has significant impact on peoples' welfare, social stability and economic development. The Chinese Government also recognizes that AIDS control is an issue that can only be effectively tackled with coordinated efforts by all sectors of society – government, non-governmental organizations and private business sectors, as well as the local community. As the world's most populous country, China's experiences and lessons in AIDS prevention and control should have significant implications for the rest of the world."

Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) asserted that "we must address the stigma faced by people living with HIV. If we do not, all other efforts will be severely undermined. Business can play a big role in breaking the silence and reducing stigma."

Prof. John Ruggie, Director of Harvard University's Center for Business and Government explains, "unless China acts decisively, it will find itself on an African trajectory, just 15 years behind. In Africa, governments and businesses are looking back at what they should and could have done – in China, there is still time to avert the worst-case scenario."

“Business views working with the Government and other key stakeholders as an essential component of a long-term investment in China, but they have to be able to talk about HIV as a business risk. But what stops this discussion is stigma – to overcome the stigma, business must talk to workers, to government and to each other. We must talk about AIDS, and then we must act,” said Dr Kate Taylor, Director of the World Economic Forum’s Global Health Initiative.

Building on existing cross-sectoral relationships and focusing on concrete actions that need to be taken by stakeholders, today’s meeting was held jointly by Harvard, the Forum and UNAIDS. It was the fourth in a series called “HIV/AIDS and Business in Africa and Asia: Building Sustainable Partnerships”. The previous workshops took place earlier this year at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts and at the World Economic Forum’s Africa Economic Summit in Durban, South Africa. For more information, visit the following websites: <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/cbg/hiv-aids/> or <http://www.weforum.org/globalhealth>. The results from all four workshops will be discussed at the World Economic Forum’s 2004 Annual Meeting in Davos.

The World Economic Forum, best known for its Annual Meeting in Davos, is hosting its 22nd China Business Summit in Beijing on 6-7 November. The Summit is the first international business-focused meeting after the landmark National People’s Congress held recently in Beijing. For the first time in its history, the Summit is being held in cooperation with the UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) and the WTO (World Trade Organization). The local partner for the Summit is the China Enterprise Confederation.

The World Economic Forum is an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world. The Forum provides a collaborative framework for the world's leaders to address global issues, engaging particularly its corporate members in global citizenship. Incorporated as a foundation, and based in Geneva, Switzerland, the World Economic Forum is impartial and not-for-profit; it is tied to no political, partisan or national interests. The Forum has NGO consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. (<http://www.weforum.org>)

Harvard University’s Center for Business and Government helps to develop solutions to some of society’s most challenging problems at the interface of business and government. It is a catalyst, convener, and innovator at the critical intersection where private enterprise meets governance. (<http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/cbg/>)

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UNAIDS, is the main advocate for global action on the epidemic. It leads, strengthens and supports an expanded response aimed at preventing transmission of HIV, providing care and support, reducing the vulnerability of individuals and communities to HIV/AIDS, and alleviating the impact of the epidemic. You may also visit the UNAIDS website, www.unaids.org, for more information about the programme.

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