

## UNITED NATIONS CALLS FOR UNIFIED ACTION IN FIGHTING AIDS ACROSS COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

**Moscow, 1 April 2005** – Today the co-sponsoring organizations of UNAIDS called for a broad-based response to the AIDS epidemic in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The call for action was made at a ministerial meeting hosted by the government of Russia, that included CIS Ministers of Health, Justice, Interior, Development and Social Services, representatives from NGOs, health experts from the public and private sectors, and other officials from the UN and CIS governments.

Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS and Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the current Chair of UNAIDS' Committee of Cosponsoring organizations urged governments to do the right thing.

"This meeting is happening at the right time, for the right reasons, and at the right place," said Mr. Costa. "Roughly 1.4 million in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region are estimated to be living with HIV and AIDS<sup>1</sup>. In some of the countries in the region, up to 80 per cent of HIV cases are attributable to drug abuse<sup>2</sup>," the UNODC Executive Director added.

Mr. Costa urged governments to pass the legislation many countries still need to begin the campaign against the spread of HIV. "Without the appropriate legal framework, governments cannot move forward with effective policies and programmes," he said.

"Eastern Europe and Central Asia are experiencing one of the world's fastest growing HIV/AIDS epidemics with more than 80% of reported HIV infections in young people under the age of 29. This will affect the region's socio-economic and development and security if action is not taken now," said Dr. Piot. "The increased political commitment we are seeing is encouraging but this must be translated into action on-the-ground. AIDS requires an exceptional response, one that starts at the highest political level."

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<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS AIDS Epidemic Update 2004

<sup>2</sup> UNAIDS AIDS Epidemic Update 2004