

UNAIDS AND THAI MINISTRIES JOIN FORCES TO COMBAT HIV IN UNIFORMED SERVICES

Bangkok, 12 July 2004 — Today the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) signed an agreement to tackle HIV among the uniformed services with Thailand's Minister of Defence, General Chetta Thanajaro and the Minister of Public Health, Mrs. Sudarat Keyuraphan. Focusing on young men and women, all parties will work together to reduce the impact of HIV and increase prevention efforts.

Underscoring the importance of coordination and leadership, today, UNAIDS and the Royal Thai Army, released a joint report titled, *UNAIDS Best Practice Report – The Royal Thai Army Experience*. The findings demonstrate how Thailand has already taken huge steps in combating the virus among its armed forces. HIV prevalence rates among Thai uniformed services fell by a dramatic 75% between 1993 and 2003—from 4% to less than 1%.

“HIV presents a grave danger to our young men and women in uniform and strikes at the very heart of national security,” said General Thanajaro. “Although we have made a profound impact on the AIDS epidemic in this country and reduced prevalence, we cannot afford to be complacent.”

This is a major success since uniformed services, especially the young, are highly vulnerable to HIV. During peacetime the military around the globe are two-to-five times more likely to contract sexually transmitted infections than the civilian population and in times of conflict this risk can increase by a factor of fifty.

“The Thai Army’s willingness to confront AIDS at an early stage should stand as a lesson for militaries and governments everywhere,” said Dr. Ulf Kristoffersson, Director of the UNAIDS office on AIDS, Security and Humanitarian Response. “And their commitment to ensuring long-term prevention is absolutely the only way we will win this battle,” he added.

The partnership agreement recognises that working with uniformed services will contribute greatly to pushing forward the overall national response to the virus. It is aimed at ensuring that a new generation of young Thai men and women in uniform remains HIV-free.

Thailand joins a growing list of countries, including Mongolia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Mozambique, Peru and Uruguay, fully committed to challenging the virus among uniformed services. UNAIDS is now working with approximately 60 countries worldwide on developing awareness and prevention programmes for men and women in uniform. These initiatives reaffirm previous commitments by the UN Security Council regarding the impact of HIV/AIDS on international peacekeeping and those contained in the UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted by all member states at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS in June 2001.

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