



Press release

LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION ON AIDS

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, 22 February 2005 – The Steering Committee of the Asia Pacific Leadership Forum on HIV/AIDS and Development (APLF) met last week to discuss ways in which both political and civil society leadership can be supported and strengthened in the region to reduce the spread of AIDS.

The Governor General of Papua New Guinea, Sir Paulias Matane welcomed the members of the Asia Pacific Leadership Forum on HIV/AIDS and Development to the country, calling the AIDS epidemic a crisis of spiritual, social, economic and political consequence. He reaffirmed the need for “effective leadership through active advocacy, commitment and allocation of national resources and the mobilization of citizens to action”, in order to curb the alarming rates of infection now seen in Papua New Guinea.

Dr Peter Piot, UNAIDS Executive Director and member of the APLF Steering Committee, called Papua New Guinea the “new frontline of the epidemic” as we have not seen such alarming rates of infection before in the Pacific. Dr Piot visited a number of initiatives while in Papua New Guinea. At the launch of “I Gat Hope”, an organization for people living with HIV, Dr Piot reminded participants that the launch of I Gat Hope was a “defining moment for the response to AIDS in Papua New Guinea.”

Papua New Guinea has the highest HIV prevalence in the Pacific with 0.6% of the adult population infected -- or roughly 16 000 people. Recent national estimates from a Consensus Workshop held in November 2004 suggest that the prevalence rate could be as high as 1.7% among 15-49 year olds.

Dr Banare Bun, Chair of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on HIV/AIDS, stated that Papua New Guinea “is a free sex society, where substance abuse and violence are major contributors to risk behaviour”. Dr Ninkama Moiya, Director of the National AIDS Council Secretariat joined Dr Bun in stressing that all of these issues are not discussed in Papua New Guinea and until they are openly addressed the AIDS epidemic will continue to grow.

The two-day meeting concluded with APLF Steering Committee members resolving to bring greater focus to the initiative through not only their own individual and collective action, but also through engaging other leaders in particular those from the media and business sector, to speak out.

The APLF, a leadership initiative agreed in 2001 at the first Asia Pacific Ministerial Meeting on HIV/AIDS by 33 countries in the region, is funded by the governments of Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union. The APLF’s aim is to keep HIV at the top of regional and national agendas in Asia and the Pacific, to promote effective leadership and to intensify commitment at all levels.

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