



## Press release

### UNAIDS AND THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA JOIN FORCES TO COMBAT HIV IN UNIFORMED SERVICES

**New Delhi, 28 April 2005** – Today, India's Minister of Defence, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, and Dr Ulf Kristoffersson, Director of the UNAIDS Office on AIDS, Security and Humanitarian Response, announced the signing of a partnership agreement committing both parties to work together to reduce the impact of HIV and increase prevention efforts among military personnel, particularly young men and women.

With some 1.3 million active members in the Indian military and 535,000 in the reserve, the partnership agreement has the potential to affect a large segment of the country's population.

"I can assure you that from this part of the world we will demonstrate even more commitment and action in the fight against AIDS," said Mr Mukherjee.

Uniformed services are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection due to a number of factors, among them the young age of military personnel. The majority are in the age group at greatest risk for infection, the sexually active group under 24 years of age. During peacetime military personnel are up to five times more likely to contract sexually transmitted infections (STIs)—including HIV—than the civilian population. In times of conflict this risk can be significantly higher.

"I am very pleased to see the Indian Government at the forefront of the battle against AIDS. Its commitment to confronting the epidemic at an early stage, focusing on long-term prevention education of young men and women in uniform, should stand as a lesson for militaries and governments in the region and elsewhere," said Dr Kristoffersson.

Under this partnership, UNAIDS will assist the Ministry of Defence, the National Cadet Corps and the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) with designing and implementing a comprehensive HIV-prevention programme among military ranks. The programme will include awareness-raising initiatives, peer education training and the integration of HIV/AIDS/STI-related topics into the curricula of military schools throughout the country. It will also help enhance the capacities of military health professionals to effectively manage and deliver high-quality care as well as support efforts to decrease stigma and discrimination surrounding military personnel living with HIV.

"We have to protect the people that protect us," said Dr Anbumani Romdoss, India's Minister of Health and Family Welfare, who was also present at the partnership signing.

The agreement was signed against the backdrop of a three-day peer leadership workshop on HIV and AIDS for uniformed services. Under the motto "Together we can conquer," military personnel of all ranks are being trained as peer educators and trainers of trainers, in collaboration with civil society organizations, including people living with HIV networks. The workshop has been organized by India's military forces, in partnership with NACO, the US Pacific Command and UNAIDS.

UNAIDS is now working with more than 75 countries worldwide to develop HIV awareness and prevention programmes for men and women in uniform. These initiatives reaffirm previous commitments by the United Nations Security Council regarding the impact of HIV and AIDS on international peacekeeping as well as those contained in the UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted by all member states at the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS held in June 2001.

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