



Press release

JACKIE CHAN, UNICEF/UNAIDS GOODWILL AMBASSADOR, SAYS STOP DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

Hanoi, 25 April 2005 – At the conclusion of his first mission to Viet Nam, UNICEF/ UNAIDS Goodwill Ambassador Jackie Chan called for an end to discrimination and stigma towards children and families infected or affected with HIV/AIDS.

“I may be a movie hero, but the real heroes are the people I’ve met in Viet Nam, among them, grandparents, mothers and wives, and many young people and children, who are showing real courage in dealing with living with HIV/AIDS and who must be supported much more,” said the action film superstar, during his 22-25 April mission.

An estimated 215,000 people in Viet Nam are already infected with HIV/AIDS and every day between 40 to 120 people, the majority under the age of 29, are being infected.

Jackie Chan travelled to Quang Ninh Province, north east of Hanoi, which has the highest HIV prevalence rate in the country. At an “empathy club” meeting – support group for people living with HIV/AIDS – Chan heard how stigma and discrimination continue to inflict pain and alienation and also hamper efforts to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. He listened attentively to a 10-year old girl who had lost both her grandparents and father to AIDS and who was regularly shunned by school friends, and a mother sharing her anguish at not being able to afford to cremate her husband in his home town.

With many people continuing to associate HIV with negative stereotypes of drug addicts, prostitutes and “bad behavior”, the world famous actor’s visit sent a powerful message that no one is immune from the disease and more must be done to foster care and support within communities and society at large.

“Jackie Chan’s visit has been enormously popular. Clearly he is an important role model, for young and old alike, and his visit has done much to accelerate Viet Nam’s fight to help combat the disease, said Anne Attard, Officer in Charge of UNICEF, who accompanied the actor on his visit. “It is important that we build from Jackie Chan’s visit and continue to strengthen our prevention and advocacy efforts”

While In Quang Ninh, Chan also toured the first-ever antenatal clinic that will soon provide regular counseling, testing and information on the prevention of mother-to-child-transmission (PMTCT) of HIV.

Back in Hanoi, the charismatic actor joined monks from Phap Van Pagoda and witnessed how they too are fully involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS. He joined in a meditation session with the monks and many of the 100 “Lotus Club” members, made up of people living with HIV and their families. They come several times a month to benefit from spiritual counseling, information and food.

The pagoda is part of the Buddhist Leadership Initiative which started in 2002 with support from UNICEF. It is now active in anti-HIV/AIDS networks within the sub region including

Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, southern China, Myanmar and Viet Nam.

With boundless energy, the action movie star later joined children aged between nine and sixteen years at a meeting of a Healthy Living Club in an inner city neighborhood in Hanoi. With 30 per cent of the total population under age 30, and more than half of all new infections occurring among young people between the ages of 20-29, the visit highlighted the importance of strengthening HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness activities amongst children and young people.

The Healthy Living Clubs, initiated in 2001 and operating in 60 communes target young people in and out of school with HIV education and also seek to equip them with practical skills in communication, negotiation and to build self confidence to reduce high risk behavior.

“The Government of Viet Nam says that 2005 must be the year of action on HIV/AIDS and Jackie Chan’s visit tells us to punch stigma and kick discrimination, “ said Jordan Ryan, the UN Resident Coordinator in Viet Nam and Chair of the UN HIV/AIDS Theme Group, at a reception held in Chan’s honour on Sunday evening in Hanoi.

Jackie Chan’s successful visit gives added impetus to Viet Nam’s commitment to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS as presented in the 2004 National Strategy on HIV/AIDS, which has been welcomed by the United Nations Country Team.

Jackie Chan also found time in his busy schedule to appear in the television production of the Millennium Development Goals television series “*Tomorrow is Yours and Mine*” directed by well- known Vietnamese film director Pham Hoang Nam and produced by the UN in Viet Nam. In the episode on HIV/AIDS, Jackie Chan makes a guest appearance and shares a meal with people who are HIV positive. The series is expected to be broadcast in Viet Nam later in the year.

Jackie Chan’s Viet Nam visit to observe HIV/AIDS projects followed on from his successful Cambodian mission where he saw first hand the effects of landmines on children.

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Note to Editors:

Goodwill Ambassadors are celebrities with a demonstrated commitment to improving the lives of children. Highly talented in their own right, they all share an ability to bring children’s issues to global attention, to galvanise support from the public and leading decision makers, and to raise urgently needed funds for vital UN programmes.

Among the early UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors were such legends as Danny Kaye, Audrey Hepburn and the recently deceased Sir Peter Ustinov, who have been joined over the years by luminaries such as Sir Roger Moore, Jessica Lange, Harry Belafonte, Tetsuko Kuroyanagi and football player George Weah.
