

### PACIFIC ISLANDS POLICE TO RECEIVE AIDS TRAINING

#### UNAIDS signs partnership with police chiefs to tackle AIDS in Pacific

**Suva, 13 September 2005** – Twenty one police chiefs from the Pacific joined forces with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) today to tackle HIV and AIDS among its police forces by signing a Declaration of Partnership. The ceremony took place during the 34<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police Conference in Fiji.

The Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), an organization of commissioners, directors and police chiefs of the national police, represents 75,000 police personnel from twenty-one nations across Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia.

“This initiative is a major step towards scaling up HIV prevention measures among police from the Pacific region working overseas. This will also ensure more protection for their families and communities,” said Ulf Kristoffersson, Director of the UNAIDS Office on AIDS, Security and Humanitarian Response, during the official signing ceremony.

The Pacific Island countries and territories are increasingly engaging in regional and international security-oriented initiatives, such as the Regional Assistance Mission, Solomon Islands. The Pacific region is one of the largest contributors of police personnel serving on UN peacekeeping operations. The initiative aims to provide training on HIV and AIDS for police from the Pacific region before they are deployed overseas.

“We welcome the new partnership with UNAIDS as it will allow our police personnel to get all the facts about HIV and learn how to protect themselves and their partners from the virus,” said Andrew Hughes, Fiji Police Commissioner. “In today’s world, we can no longer pretend that the risk of HIV does not exist. Being informed can save your life.”

Although the current HIV prevalence is low in many Pacific Island countries, the epidemic is fast becoming a grave concern in Papua New Guinea, which has the highest prevalence in the region with 1.7%. The uniformed services, and in particular young men and women serving on long deployments overseas, are highly vulnerable to HIV because of their work environment, mobility, and age.

Most police officers deployed in regional and international security missions are not well informed about HIV prevention. With support from UNAIDS, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and New Zealand’s International Aid and Development Agency (NZAID), PICP is implementing a two-year programme on AIDS education. The programme will involve PICP’s police force and command in an effort to prevent the spread of HIV among police serving abroad and minimize new infections when they return home.

The issue of AIDS and security will be further highlighted at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Pan Pacific Regional HIV/AIDS Conference, to be held in Auckland, New Zealand from 25-28 October 2005.

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