

PACIFIC ON BRINK OF SERIOUS HIV EPIDEMIC

Governments must make solid commitments to invest in national responses, UNAIDS Regional Director says

Auckland, 25 October 2005 – The Pacific region needs a comprehensive multi-sectored response to AIDS, backed by political leadership, if it is to effectively address the growing threat of a serious HIV epidemic, Asia Pacific Regional Director for the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Dr. Prasada Rao said at the Pan Pacific Regional HIV/AIDS Conference which opened in Auckland, New Zealand on Tuesday 25 October.

“We are at risk in the Pacific of a serious HIV epidemic. The question is not whether this will happen, but when this will happen, whether it does so or not will depend on the decisions made now, not in ten years,” Dr. Rao said in a speech made at the ‘*marae*’ opening ceremony of the conference, underlining that governments and donors must bolster currently-inadequate resources for HIV prevention, treatment and care programs across the Pacific

“Fighting AIDS on the political stage –where struggles over power and resources are fought –is crucial to winning the battle. We need governments throughout the Pacific to make substantial commitments by investing now,” he said.

Citing data from Papua New Guinea where an estimated 1.7% of the adult population or approximately 47,000 people are infected with HIV, Dr. Rao said the epidemic is on its way to spreading throughout Pacific Island countries, with potentially devastating effects. “In small island nations we are talking about the very survival of peoples, cultures, languages, and security of nations,” he said.

More than three hundred delegates from governments, non-governmental organizations and the scientific community from across the region are gathered to bolster the regional response to HIV and AIDS. The conference will continue through Friday.

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