

Press release

Horn of Africa addresses HIV vulnerability among mobile populations

Djibouti, 29 June 2006 – The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and Djibouti’s Ministry of Health are hosting a regional consultation to address the growing HIV vulnerability in the Horn of Africa.

The consultation, being held from 29 June to 1 July 2006, brings together government representatives from Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia and Yemen, as well as regional and international partners to define innovative regional programmes that address HIV vulnerability among mobile populations.

Located at the crossroads of the Middle East and Africa, and with a population of approximately 130 million, this region is characterized by socio-cultural and historical links, as well as mobility between countries. “This region is currently facing arduous humanitarian crises and major development challenges which results in people moving across borders, placing them outside the reach of national HIV programmes and services.” said Oussama Tawil, Director of the UNAIDS Regional Support Team for the Middle East and North Africa.

Approximately two million people are living with HIV within the six concerned countries. One of the key challenges is reducing the vulnerability of mobile populations to HIV. “We have a long history of movement across borders in our region, and we know that mobile population groups may have limited access to HIV prevention and treatment services. This is a challenge to the region in its entirety and cannot be solved through national responses alone,” stated HE Abdallah Abdillahi Miguil, Minister of Health Djibouti.

Issues relating to legal status, limited access to health services, and diverse risk factors, are among some of the formidable challenges facing mobile communities, putting them at increased risk of HIV infection. Mobile population groups are also often stigmatized due to an unsupported myth that they are responsible for the spread of HIV. Dr Said Warsame, Executive Director of the Puntland AIDS Commission stated recently, “HIV is in all our countries. We must now move beyond apportioning blame and work together as a region to reduce the impact of HIV and AIDS.”

Countries participating in the consultation will discuss ways to improve access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services for mobile and the host populations with whom they interact in the region.

Contacts

Sinead Ryan | UNAIDS | tel. +25381 02 96; +2012 103 3513 | ryans@unids.org