

PRESS RELEASE:

Independent Asia Pacific Commission on AIDS to examine regional epidemic in fresh light

Toronto, 14 August 2006 – An Independent Commission set up to better analyze the impact AIDS could have on economies, societies, individuals and families in Asia and the Pacific outlined its agenda of work today at the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto, Canada.

Launched in July of this year in New Delhi, India, the Commission on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific brings together 10 of Asia and the Pacific's leading development economists, policy makers, public health experts and civil society representatives working on AIDS. The goal of this Commission is to generate strong evidence-based policy recommendations to guide and mobilize leaders and governments in the region to urgently respond to the AIDS epidemic.

At the end of 2005, there were an estimated 8.3 million persons living with HIV in Asia and the Pacific and the numbers are growing rapidly. Over the last five years financial resources for AIDS in the region has more than tripled, however, the coverage of prevention and treatment services remain dismally low ranging from 5-20% across the region. Despite these startling numbers, political commitment on AIDS in the region often remains weak.

"AIDS in Asia and the Pacific needs to be examined in a fresh way," said Mr JVR Prasda Rao, Director of UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Asia and the Pacific, outlining how UNAIDS requested Dr Chakravarthi Rangarajan, a globally renowned economist and Chief Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister of India, to Chair and set up the independent Commission. "The Commission can be brutally frank and should recommend what governments, the UN system, civil society and donors need to do to make an impact on the epidemic in Asia and the Pacific," stated Mr Rao.

To date, the analysis of the impact of AIDS has been poor for the region and data is still limited in many countries. The true impact of stigma and discrimination faced by people living with HIV and among those most at risk, for example, has yet to be analyzed deeply.

Over a period of 18 months, the Commission will collect and synthesize existing data, conduct strategic research, and make an objective analysis of the consequences of the AIDS epidemic in the region, and its medium to long term implications on the socio-economic environment. A series of sub-regional consultations will be held in different venues in South Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific with inputs from local academics, government officials, civil society, multilateral organizations and experts in the field.

"The Commission needs to suggest concrete policy options in the areas of prevention, treatment and care and impact mitigation to significantly move the AIDS response forward in Asia and the Pacific," stated Dr Rangarajan during the official launch of the Commission in New Delhi in July. The Commission will bring out a Report at the end of 2007 with its recommendations, which will be widely disseminated.

COMMISSION ON AIDS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

List of Members

1. Dr Chakravarthy Rangarajan

Chairman, Chief Economic Adviser
to the Prime Minister of India

2. Hon. Nerissa Corazon Soon-Ruiz
Member, Congress Representative,
6th District – Cebu, Philippines
3. Rajat Kumar Gupta
Member, Senior Partner Worldwide,
McKinsey & Company
4. Tim Brown
Member, Epidemiologist and senior
research fellow, East West Centre,
Hawaii
5. Maire Bopp Dupont
Member, Journalist and Chief
Executive Officer, Pacific Islands
AIDS Foundation (PIAF)
6. Tadashi Yamamoto
Member, President, Japan Center
for International Exchange (JCIE)
7. Dr Wu Zunyou
Member, Director, National AIDS
Centre, China
8. Dr Chalongphob Sussangkarn
Member, President, Thailand
Development Research Institute
9. Dr Mahmuda Islam
Member, Professor of Sociology,
Dhaka University, Bangladesh
10. JVR Prasada Rao
Member Secretary, Director,
UNAIDS Regional Support Team
for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok

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