

SPEECH

By: M. Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS

Date: 25 October 2014

Place: Hanoi, Vietnam

Occasion: Launch of Vietnam's 90-90-90 Initiative

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90-90-90: A transformative agenda to leave no one behind

I want to begin this meeting with a few words of gratitude from my heart. Thank you Deputy Prime Minister, thank you Prime Minister, thank you Minister of Health and thank you to the former Deputy Prime Minister, my big brother. You have shown today your strong personal commitment: Your commitment to ending AIDS by 2030; your commitment to the people of Vietnam; and your commitment to fighting for inclusion, for human rights and for people who have no voice.

This bold new set of targets, 90-90-90, will do more than reduce new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths. It will be a transformative agenda for reaching people who are left behind. We have heard from Minister Tien that—with a lot of effort—they have been able to put 38 percent of people in Vietnam who need it on HIV treatment. By 2020, our cascading targets are to have at least 90 percent of all Vietnamese living with HIV know their diagnosis; 90 percent of those people to be receiving antiretroviral treatment; and 90 percent of those on HIV treatment to have an undetectable viral load.

Why did we choose Vietnam to launch our global campaign? Because this country has demonstrated throughout its history that it is a place where transformation takes place. Its remarkable recovery from war, its rapid economic growth and its drive to be a leader among nations is impressive. And Vietnam has not shied away from putting social change at the centre of its agenda.

I remember when I visited this country a few years ago, no one wanted to talk about drug users. They were at the margins of society, and they had to hide themselves, with no access to services or treatment. But this changed completely when Vietnam put itself at the global forefront of harm reduction by providing government-sponsored methadone maintenance treatment. I visited South Tu Liem district health centre yesterday and saw people coming in freely to receive methadone. I also met with representatives of civil society who told me that their lives have completely changed the lives of people and families—that a wife or husband no longer has to risk going out to buy heroin from criminals, and families have been able to improve their financial stability.

Through the same health centre, family members can receive HIV counselling and testing, antiretroviral treatment, tuberculosis diagnosis and treatment, prevention of mother-to-child

transmission and home-based care and peer support for treatment adherence. This integrated, holistic approach reaches far into the corners of the community to the hidden and underserved.

This is what we are working toward with 90-90-90: Being able to reach those who are left behind—drug users, sex workers, LGBT people and others who have to stay out of sight because of laws against how they live and even who they love.

I congratulate your country for having the courage to stop detaining sex workers in “05 Centres.” I met a sex worker yesterday who told me, “If you have the opportunity, I hope you will lead an effort to try to restore our dignity.” The important work to end AIDS includes far more than just giving pills to people. Yes, providing everyone access to a lifetime of treatment is critical, but the lives we are prolonging must also be lives of dignity and respect.

Vietnam has also succeeded in transforming the nature of its HIV epidemic. I remember a few years ago when I first met my brother, His Excellency Mr. Truong Vinh Trong. We were scared and discussing the possibility that AIDS could devastate this country, with its existing poverty and large youth population with no jobs and little hope. But today, we can say that Vietnam managed to break the frightening trajectory HIV was taking. New infections have fallen by more than 50 percent since 2007. You managed to reduce the death rate in the same way. You have achieved 65 percent coverage for services to eliminate mother-to-child transmission and keep mothers living with HIV alive. I know that if you redouble your efforts, before the end of 2015 we will be able to announce to the world that Vietnam has become one of the first countries to have zero babies born with HIV. For me, this is a unique victory, because achieving an AIDS-free generation marks the beginning of the end of this epidemic.

90-90-90 will be a transformative approach for Vietnam also because it will forever change the paradigm of investing in the AIDS response. It will reduce the unit costs of reaching everyone—and anyone. It will help us ensure that at least 90 percent of pregnant women living with HIV will have access to services. It will help us ensure that at least 90 percent of the key populations I mentioned will have access to services. And it will help us ensure that at least 90 percent of children—often the forgotten face of our fight against AIDS—will have access to treatment.

I also want to congratulate Vietnam on its commitment to invest in domestic solutions, even increasing your national budget for HIV. I encourage you to use UNAIDS’ Investment Framework so that the money you spend now can deliver 10 times the return later in lives and livelihoods saved. This is also an opportunity to make Vietnam’s AIDS response more sustainable by reducing its dependency on external sources to fund treatment. That is a goal we share.

90-90-90 is our path to victory. It is our path to the end of this epidemic worldwide. When we talk about ending AIDS, we mean that by 2030, HIV and AIDS will no longer threaten human life. Of course there will be new cases of HIV, but the virus will no longer be a public health danger. I am sure, with the leadership I am seeing in this room today, that we will achieve this right here, and well before 2030.

And I urge you, esteemed leaders, to remember the very interesting conversation we had before this meeting about making Vietnam the first country to completely reform the use of detention centres for drug users. We will make your approach a new formula for community-based rehabilitation that other countries can apply. What you do here will transform the lives of people all over the world. And the ultimate payoff will be ending AIDS by 2030.

It will be the greatest gift we can offer to the people of Vietnam, the world and the generation to come. And leaders, it will be your lasting legacy.

Thank you.

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The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners to maximize results for the AIDS response. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.