

## Press statement

### **TRAGIC FIRE CLAIMS THE LIVES OF 45 WOMEN AT MOSCOW DRUG REHABILITATION CENTRE: MESSAGE FROM UNAIDS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**Geneva, 10 December 2006** - The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) expresses shock at the news of the tragic fire in Moscow that claimed the lives of 45 young women and two hospital staff members who were trapped behind locked doors and barred windows at the drug rehabilitation centre, Hospital No. 17. Many of the women were living with HIV and being treated for drug dependency.

“We send our thoughts to the families and loved ones of the young women so tragically killed. It is really important that the cause of their death is fully investigated to determine whether this was arson, negligence or the result of insufficient safety standards,” said UNAIDS Executive Director Dr. Peter Piot. “We welcome the statements made today by Russian officials that an investigation is underway and that safety equipment and procedures of all health facilities will be inspected,” he added.

In the Russian Federation, as well as in most countries in the Eastern European and Central Asian region, the vast majority of people living with HIV are young people who became infected through injecting drug use.

UNAIDS reiterates the call for measures that ensure the dignity and human rights, coupled with compassion and tolerance. “All approaches for dealing with drug dependency and HIV should be based on effective scientifically-proven and evidence-based harm reduction strategies,” underlined Dr Piot.

“There must always be a non-judgmental approach to all those who voluntarily decide to be treated for drug dependency,” said Bertil Lindblad, UNAIDS Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia. “They must not be portrayed in mass-media as criminals or as people who do not deserve rehabilitation, services and support. For drug dependent people living with HIV, specific programmes and services must also be in place.”

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